



A University of Sussex DPhil thesis

Available online via Sussex Research Online:

<http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/>

This thesis is protected by copyright which belongs to the author.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Please visit Sussex Research Online for more information and further details

**Boundary Paradoxes: The Social Life of Transparency
and Accountability Activism in Delhi**

Martin Webb

Thesis Submitted for the Examination of D.Phil in Social Anthropology

University of Sussex

October 2010

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree

Signature:.....

Summary

Based on fieldwork carried out in Delhi during 2006-2007 this thesis explores the social world of transparency and accountability activism in the city. I focus in particular on the activism scene that has grown up around the campaign for and implementation of the national Right to Information Act 2005. There is a global interest in improving the transparency and accountability of government bureaucracies, and in schemes to foster active citizenship. In tune with this campaigns to provide Indian citizens with a right to access government information have captured the imagination of activists, policy makers, and national and international donor organisations.

For transparency and accountability activists rights to access government information offer Indian citizens opportunities to interrogate official procedures and hold officers individually accountable; to provide people with mechanisms with which they might become more 'active' as citizens; and to provide a means of monitoring the performance of the state in fulfilling its constitutional responsibilities regarding welfare, equality and social justice.

Taking boundaries as my theme my work looks at the activist scene in Delhi from an ethnographic perspective, investigating *how* activist projects work. I argue that the ideology and practice of transparency and accountability activism is concerned with boundaries in two ways. First it is directed at illuminating and delineating boundaries between the state and society, and public and private roles. The intention is to combat the effects of private influence and unofficial practices that might lead to the misallocation of government resources. Second it is directed at transcending social and spatial boundaries based on class, caste or community in order to enrol people into projects aimed at producing empowered and active citizens.

However, in looking at the activist scene a number of what I call 'boundary paradoxes' become apparent. Activist campaigns to get transparency and accountability legislation passed rely in part on the personal connections to the highest levels of government of activists from India's social elite. At the grassroots level activists play a mediating role between the local state and poor or illiterate clients. Social and cultural capital, space, class and gender distinctions emerge as significant factors in the everyday practice of activism, in turn reproducing existing social hierarchies in activist organisations. While seeking transparency and accountability from others activists have to negotiate the boundaries of transparency and accountability in their own organisations, deciding what can be made public and what should remain hidden. And, as activism is organised through informal networks sustaining a livelihood and a full time role in the scene immerses activists in webs of patron-client relations, recommendations and obligations, the antithesis of the disciplined, transparent and accountable bureaucratic organisation that transparency and accountability activism requires from the state.

My thesis contains examples of the positive effects that involvement in activism can have, particularly for people from some of Delhi's poorer neighbourhoods. However, although activism is directed at producing a future that conforms to activist's ideal constructions of how India *should* be, activists must work in the present to bring this future about. I argue that even as activists work for change, activism itself is a site in which the existing structures of society are reproduced.

Contents

Acknowledgements.	7
Chapter 1: Introduction	9
<i>Promoting Transparency, Accountability and Anti-Corruption: An Emerging 'Field'.</i>	13
<i>Two Narratives about the State and Society: Connecting "Good" Governance, Rights and Social Justice</i>	17
<i>Transparency, Accountability and Anti-Corruption as part of the Good Governance Paradigm.</i>	17
<i>Transparency, Accountability and the Language of Rights</i>	21
<i>Strong Boundaries: Where Good Governance and the Language of Rights Agree</i> .	22
<i>Intersections and Imaginations of State and Society: An Ethnographic View.</i>	24
<i>Boundaries and Connections</i>	25
<i>Mediation</i>	28
<i>Imagining the Everyday State and Society.</i>	33
<i>The Material State and Technologies of Rule.</i>	35
<i>Thinking with Transparency and Accountability</i>	40
<i>Research Questions.</i>	44
<i>Revealing Ground Realities and Boundary Paradoxes: The Structure of the Thesis.</i>	45
 Chapter 2. Entering the Field: The City and its Spaces, Boundaries and Distinctions.	49
<i>Entering the Field.</i>	51
<i>Delhi as the Local. The Physical Development of Social Space in the City.</i>	53
<i>Classes and Spaces.</i>	64
<i>Framing the Middle Class</i>	65
<i>Not Mentioning the 'Undoables': Merit, Equality and why Transparency and Accountability Activists in Delhi don't talk about Caste.</i>	72
<i>Three Urban Spaces</i>	77
<i>The Colonies of the Elite and Upper Middle Class.</i>	78
<i>Delhi's Slums and the Informal Working Classes.</i>	84
<i>The City of the Middle and Lower Middle classes.</i>	90
<i>A Note on 'Civil' and 'Political Society'</i>	93
 Chapter 3: Who, Where and How: Reflecting on the Field, Access and Methodology	97
<i>Encountering Activists</i>	97
<i>Scenes and 'Movements'</i>	98
<i>Transparency and Accountability Activism in the City: Grassroots Sangathans...</i>	101
<i>The City as the Nation: Activists Working at the Policy Level.</i>	103
<i>Translocal and Transnational Aspects of Transparency and Accountability Activism.</i>	105

<i>Studying Through, Multilocality and Multivocality: A Research Method for the City</i>	106
<i>Reflecting on Access</i>	108

Chapter 4: Framing Corruption, Transparency and Accountability in Delhi 2006-7.	114
<i>The Knowing Story: Personal Narratives of Corruption, Connection and Encounters with the State.</i>	116
<i>Corruption Stories as Commodities: Stings and the City.</i>	123
<i>Revisiting the Freedom Struggle: The Rang De Basanti Spirit, Gandhigiri and Citizen Activism.</i>	129

Chapter 5: Disciplining the Everyday State and Society?	147
<i>The Emergence of the Right to Information in Law and Practice: Three Activist Stories</i>	150
<i>The MKSS Story</i>	151
<i>The Parivartan Story</i>	153
<i>The NCPRI Story and the Passing of the National Right to Information Act 2005.</i>	157
<i>Information, its Applications and the Difference between Soochna and Jaankaari.</i>	160
<i>The Drive Against Bribes.</i>	164
<i>A Public Audit at the Food Supply Office.</i>	172

Chapter 6: Policy and Grassroots: Working Through Class, Gender and Space In The City	185
<i>The South Delhi Sangathan: The Distinction between ‘Policy’ and the ‘Grassroots’.</i>	188
<i>Teaching Women to be Civil? The Sangathan Meeting as a Gendered and Hierarchical Space.</i>	194
<i>Anand.</i>	200
<i>Anita</i>	207
<i>Padma</i>	212
<i>The Core Group.</i>	218

Chapter 7: From the Performance of Authenticity to the Politics of Transparency	224
<i>Success Stories and the Work of Representation.</i>	227
<i>Transparency by Proxy: Authentic Voices at the South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR) Meeting.</i>	242
<i>A Transparency Tamaasha.</i>	248

Chapter 8: Informality, Commitment and How to Survive as a Full Time Activist	259
<i>The Role of Informality, Commitment and Credibility.</i>	262
<i>System Rationalists and Satyagrahis.</i>	267

<i>The Meaning of Fellowship: Leaders, Fellows and Social Entrepreneurs in the Right to Information Activism Scene.</i>	272
<i>Activism as Informal Employment.</i>	277
<i>Patrons, Clients and Fellows.</i>	280
<i>Sahila.</i>	281
<i>Sanjay, Anya and Yuva Kriya (Youth Action).</i>	285
 Chapter 9: Conclusion: Ground Realities and Boundary Paradoxes...	294
<i>Returning to my Research Questions.</i>	295
References	321

Acknowledgements.

Ethnographic research is not something that can be done alone and I have a great many people to thank for their help with my field work, and during the writing up process. I should begin by acknowledging the support of the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for its support (award No. PTA-030-2005-00125), and the the Wenner-Gren Foundation in the US which also provided a small grant (No.Gr.7429). Without these literally life changing funds I would have been unable to undertake my research. I am also very grateful to the then School of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies (SOCCUL), now Global Studies, at the University of Sussex for generously providing me with a Seed Corn Scholarship during 2004-5 which enabled me to take the Msc. in Social Research Methods and started the whole process off.

In India my first months were spent in Mussoorie studying Hindi at the Landour School and I would like to thank my teachers, in particular Yussef, Lalit and Archana for their patience, friendship, and continued tuition during the winter months in Delhi. Fellow students, who also remained friends in Delhi, made the stay in the hills entertaining, particularly Robert Canwell, Sara Capela, Nina Mohan, Julien Cayla, Leo Coleman, Morten and Anna, and Christina.

In Delhi I am indebted to the openness and generosity of all those who contributed to my research. The activists that I met in the city are exceptional people and I am forever grateful that they should have spared some of their limited time, and apparently limitless energy, to answer my questions. In particular Suchi, the Sharmas of Munirka and all at the south Delhi *sangathan* win the prize for ‘walking the talk’ and being the most transparent of transparency and accountability activists. I am also very grateful to the *Parivartan* network, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, the National Campaign for People’s Right to Information, The Association of Democratic Reforms, the Gandhian Satyagraha Brigade and affiliated organisations for their old school charm and good humour, Bibhu Mukhopadhyaya for the fascinating trip to Lucknow, Aruna Roy for her hospitality (despite the incident with the lizard), and all of the unaffiliated individual activists who gave time to discuss their lives and work.

Special thanks must be reserved for Uzma Azhar, Kamal Misra, Imtiyazali Marediya, Vinita Priyadarshini and Nina Mohan for their invaluable research assistance and patience in translation and transcription, particularly the ponderous task of going through recorded conversations sentence by sentence. I am also grateful to the Director and administrative staff of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) for providing me with the necessary affiliation for my research visa, and prompt attention to bureaucratic details.

Life in Delhi was not all about activism. The Sachars of Uday Park provided us with the ideal home in Delhi, and made sure that everything kept working. The Lightfoot-Bastins, Amy, Ed, Louie, and now Oslo, became and have remained good friends and showed us that family might be the way. Shalab Kaul, refreshingly having never heard of political correctness, explained a great many things about Delhi. Diya Mehra offered

anthropological insights into the sealings issue and the price of gin and tonic at the IIC. The Khoj network connected us to a world of art and fun, and Ramesh, Khan Senior and Khan Junior at the Shiva Guesthouse provided us with an occasional home from home.

In the UK I must first thank my academic supervisors Buzz Harrison and Geert de Neve for their close reading and sound advice. Joint supervision has always been a pleasure and I will miss their guidance. Buzz Harrison was my undergraduate dissertation supervisor and I am particularly grateful for her continued support and interest over the years as the ideas that I first set down there have developed. I must also thank my thesis examiners, Professor John Harriss and Dr. Filippo Osella for their very fair and useful comments. Within the Anthropology Department at Sussex Jon Mitchell, James Fairhead and Alex Aisher have provided a good deal of friendly advice about writing up and what to do next. The support and friendship of my fellow DPhils has been much appreciated, particularly in the last year. I am particularly grateful to Sam Appleton for being a good humoured office mate, to Evi Chatzipanagiotidou for making teaching and marking entertaining, to Christina Oelgemoller for moral and administrative support, and to Clare Rogers, Grazia de Tommasi and Jayne Paulin for administering teaching and funding. I must also thank Steven Sampson and the Lund University Department of Anthropology for hosting my visit to Lund University January to March 2009 which provided an excellent opportunity to write and present ideas in new surroundings.

Finally I must thank my family, old and new. Mum and Dad have been incredibly supportive. I am the first social anthropologist in the family and I hope that they think it was worth it in the end. As for Hannah. We had only been together 6 months when I left for the field and so to leave her good job and join me in Delhi required an extraordinary leap of faith. Hannah's presence in Delhi brought home to the field, and made the field much easier to work in. She also connected us to a whole new scene of artists and photographers, which inevitably connected back through to activism, journalism and academia. Delhi may be a mega city, but on some levels it is a small village.

The family has expanded while I have been writing up. Arun arrived in July 2008, Constance in May 2010, and Hannah has kept everything going while I have been scribbling. How can I thank her for all her hard work, patience and two such beautiful children? Perhaps I can begin by submitting this thesis, and dedicating it to Hannah, Arun and Connie.

Chapter 1: Introduction

‘What is distinctive about any particular society is not the fact or extent of its modernity, but rather its distinctive debates *about* modernity, the historical and cultural trajectories that shape its appropriation of the means of modernity, and the cultural sociology (principally of class and state) that determines who gets to play with modernity and what defines the rules of the game.’ (Appadurai and Breckenridge, 1995: 16)

‘Yeh sarkar hamari-aap ki, nahin kisike baap ki’

(This government is ours, not someone’s fiefdom) (*Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* slogan)
(Roy and Dey 2004)

In the winter of 1996 I was travelling from Delhi on a train bound for Amritsar in the Punjab. The second class sleeper carriage was jammed with people who, unable to squeeze into third class, had decided to take a chance and occupy any spare room in second. My seat was at the very end of the carriage next to the door. There were already 5 of us sitting on a bench made for three and at our feet in the open area by the door sat another 10. During the night we stopped for a few minutes at a small station somewhere in the Punjab. The door swung open and a young policeman carrying a *lathi*¹ (cane staff) stepped into the carriage. He immediately began shouting at the people sitting on the floor, poking luggage and bodies with his *lathi* and ordering the ticketless floor

¹ A *lathi* is the standard issue stick carried by policemen all over India, made of bamboo, about 5 feet long and metal tipped.

sitters off the train and back to third class, where any possibility of a space had long since disappeared. As the policeman pushed the last person out of the door and stepped off the train we on the bench seat stretched our legs for the first time in hours, enjoying a moment of luxury. But almost immediately a group of women carrying large bundles got on and sat down in the empty space. The policeman reappeared, only this time he made sure that the ladies were as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. He then began some emotional farewells but was cut short by the train beginning to move, and still saying a tearful goodbye to his relatives he disappeared back out of the door and into the darkness.

This was several years before I went to university to study for a degree in anthropology and development studies, but this brief moment has stayed with me throughout my subsequent research. The ambiguity inherent in the situation was striking and confusing. That the policeman had used physical force backed by the symbolic authority of his uniform to clear the space spoke of one kind of legitimacy, the representative of the state, an agent of bureaucratic order and rationality, removing people whose presence was unauthorised and illegitimate; but he was also acting according to another imperative, a moral duty to make sure that his kin were seen off safely and in as much comfort as possible considering their lack of official seats. In the first part the policeman *had* done his job, fulfilling his duty, to the brief satisfaction and relief of those of us squashed into our second class seats. But equally when the women appeared and it became clear that he was using his authority for private ends it was understood, if not exactly applauded, that perhaps he was in some way obliged to act as he did.

From the point of view of an anthropologist this moment, easily written up into a vignette, provides an opportunity to consider the complicated and fuzzy nature of the boundaries between public roles, with attached bureaucratic responsibilities and ethical imperatives, and private, moral, obligations to kith and kin. The policeman's uniform is evidence of the material existence and mythology of the nation state, but the person inside it is a social being, positioned by factors such as family relations, caste, class and political affiliation, all of which may influence his actions. Ethnographically the

policeman seems to encapsulate something about the interpenetration of state and society which suggests the need for further enquiry.

For others, perhaps those involved in development policy making or engaged in projects aimed at promoting social justice, the policeman's action may appear as just one instance of a significant problem that needs to be addressed. In helping out his relatives he has transgressed a boundary between his public role and private life, abusing public office for private interest. His action raises the perennial policy questions; how can plans for improving social justice, equality, participation and democracy succeed when those entrusted with their implementation might redirect public resources for private use, or favour some potential beneficiaries over others? And what can be done to discipline the boundary between public servants and those that would seek to influence them?

This thesis will explore the lives of transparency and accountability activists in Delhi. These are people who actively engage with these policy questions about the public, the private and social justice, by promoting mechanisms for transparency and accountability aimed at combating corruption and improving public services. In particular I will focus on activist attempts to use Right to Information legislation to interrogate bureaucratic processes and illuminate the boundary between public roles and private interests, making it more difficult for government servants and members of the public to transgress. My activist informants come from a cross-section of society. They might be individual 'crusaders' operating in cyberspace, members of local and national volunteer groups, working class *karyakarte* (social workers) or 'community mobilisers', NGO employees, journalists, lawyers or academics. They are involved in projects which advocate for and mediate with the state on behalf of clients, and contribute to policy processes focused on combating corruption and promoting ethical, efficient and responsive government. Ultimately the aim of activists is to reorder the power relationship between the citizen and the state by encouraging discipline and active citizenship in both government servants and members of the public. They seek to persuade people given to complaining about the bureaucracy to 'take responsibility for

the state if they want to change it’ as one leading activist puts it (conversation with Nikhil Dey, December 8th 2006)

The aim of my thesis will be to reveal the ‘ground realities’ of transparency and accountability activism in Delhi. ‘Ground realities’ is a term used by my activist informants to describe and problematise the power relationships that structure contemporary Indian Society. For activists, to ‘understand the ground realities’ of a place is to develop ideas and strategies through empirical engagement with situations². I will take the same empirical approach to the social world of transparency and accountability activism. As the chapters progress a series of boundary paradoxes emerge: to carry out their work, activists have to negotiate complicated intersections between the public and the private, the formal and the informal, the transparent and the opaque, and between the social and physical spaces of the city. I show that even as they attempt to institute mechanisms which serve to illuminate the boundary transgressions of others, and work to transcend boundaries between social classes and spaces, transparency and accountability activists, being of society, must work through the social structures and spatialised hierarchies of the city. Paradoxically, although activism is directed at producing change in society, it is also a site through which existing power relations are sustained and even reproduced.

My aim in this introductory chapter is to outline my field of enquiry and to lay the conceptual groundwork for the thesis. I begin by discussing how transparency, accountability and corruption, as part of a good governance paradigm, have emerged as globally important themes in international development policy, leading to the production of a transnational social world of action and resources. Then I discuss how popular normative discourses about these issues play an important role in the way that people across the world frame their imaginations of power, politics, the state and modernity. It is the practices and discourses gathered around transparency, accountability and *anti*-corruption which make up my ethnographic field

² Analogous to, and to some extent inspired by, participatory approaches to development that seek to engage with ‘local realities’ (Chambers 1997, 1747). For a brief discussion of the rhetoric of ‘ground realities’ in the world of activism in India see Jenkins and Goetz (1999, 608).

Having established my field I begin to unpack it by outlining how neo-liberal approaches to governance, and rights based approaches to development that seek to guarantee social justice, both rely on a normative construction of how the state and society *should* be. This construction, based on ideal principles of impersonal public service and active citizenship, acts as an organising principle in initiatives by government, donors, NGOs and activists in India to promote transparency and accountability and combat corruption. In this ideal conceptualisation the boundaries between state and society, and public and private roles, should be disciplined in order that good governance and civil rights can be guaranteed.

In counterpoint I then present a review of ethnographic work on the ‘everyday state and society’ (Fuller and Benei 2000) and corruption which shows the Indian state as it is actually encountered in everyday life, inseparable from local social and political power structures. I will review the literature through four interrelated themes; the boundaries and connections between state and society, the role of mediators between state and society, the disjuncture between the myth of the state and the everyday practice of government, and the material state as it is encountered in bio-political schemes to effect change.

Having noted the effect that this ethnographic work has on the direction of my own research project I go on to consider transparency and accountability as topics for research. I end by setting out some key research questions and offering a breakdown of my chapters to show how these questions will be addressed through the thesis.

Promoting Transparency, Accountability and Anti-Corruption: An Emerging ‘Field’.

The ethnographic field that my thesis investigates is part of a general trend towards ‘global ethics and moral justification in human affairs’ (Sampson 2005, 104) as, in recent years, the good governance paradigm has taken an increasingly important role in international development and government policy making (Anders 2005, 42; Corbridge et al. 2005, 2). Theorising a link between governance and poverty has led

development policy into territory previously seen as beyond its remit. In a climate where good governance is understood to be a pre-requisite for economic and social development more politicized questions of legitimacy, morality and social reorganisation are now considered to be of equal importance to the technical and economic matters that had previously been the focus for development agencies (Mosse 2004, 642). This shift has led to the reorganisation of donor and government priorities. New relationships have formed between donors, governments, charitable foundations, non-governmental organizations and research institutions, and an international governance scene comprising actors from a wide variety of locations and political agendas has emerged (Harrison 2007, 673; Sampson 2005; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006, 6).

Within this scene a transnational field dedicated to promoting transparency, accountability and anti-corruption has developed with a distinct set of knowledge resources and practices. Transparency, accountability and anti-corruption, have become key terms around which to produce indicators for human development and formulate policy, and are explicitly linked to efforts to improve citizen participation, access to rights, and government effectiveness³. New grant categories and funding streams linked to initiatives that address these issues are available for governments, and also for non-governmental actors and activists with the social and cultural capital necessary to access them (Asian Development Bank - OECD 2002; Asian Development Bank 2005; World Bank 2007; Govt. of UK: DFID 2010; Jenkins 2001, 252-253; Sampson 2005, 104,117).

Transparency, accountability and anti-corruption have undergone what Steven Sampson calls 'projectisation' (1996, 122, 2005, 109); that is, the direction of material, organizational, human and symbolic resources towards these issues has resulted in the emergence of a social world of actors and action. It is my interest in this world, allied to

³ The World Governance Indicators WGI produced by the World Bank Institute are just one influential example of this. The WGI website can be accessed at <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp> (accessed 14th April 2010) also see the work of Daniel Kaufmann who oversees the WGI for further information e.g. (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastuzzi 2008; Kaufmann and Kraay 2008).

my interest in ethnographies of development (Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Mosse 2005; Mosse and Lewis 2005; Lewis and Mosse 2006) and ethnographies of the state (Gupta 1995; Fuller and Benei 2000), that led me to plan a 'strategically situated (single site) ethnography' (Marcus 1995, 110-112) through which I might investigate the lives of some of those involved in developing and working within initiatives that promote transparency, accountability and anti-corruption in India.

Of course concerns about transparency, accountability and corruption, do not exist only in the sphere of government and development policy making. It is also important to stress how embedded ideas and narratives about these issues are in the 'ideoscapes' and 'mediascapes' (Appadurai 1996, 35-36) of nation states across the globe (Gupta 2005). They provide useful reference points within public culture with which people might describe the power relations perceived in the 'operative logic of globalizing economic and political institutions' (Sanders and West 2003, 10) and make an important contribution to political discourse.

Thus: in post-colonial Africa popular discourse concerning the illicit gains of those in power, the 'politics of the belly' (Bayart 1993), plays a central role in people's understandings of political contestation and change (Pierce 2006, 909), and in the legitimization of new regimes through the institution of commissions of enquiry into the activities of their predecessors (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006, 47-53). In political argument in the post soviet transition nations of central and eastern Europe corruption and a lack of transparency and accountability might be presented either as a product of old soviet systems of patronage (Lovell 2005, 73), or as symbolic of the failings of the post-socialist democratic state (Zerilli 2005, 84). It is also a topic through which people can express their anger at, and distrust of, politicians and government officials (Sampson 2005, 205; Miller, Grodeland, and Koschekina 2001, 62). In south and south-east Asia military takeovers and declarations of national emergency deposing democratically elected governments in Pakistan, Thailand and Bangladesh have been carried out in the name of anti-corruption and transparency. In China senior officials

charged with corruption have faced the death penalty⁴. In western Europe, America and Australasia corruption scandals and calls for greater transparency and accountability in government continue to be regular features in political debates and the media, reminding us that we cannot assume that these issues are problems confined to a non-western ‘Other’ or to developing state bureaucracies pathologised as defective⁵ (Shore and Haller, 2005: 1).

India is no exception to this phenomenon (a topic I explore in more detail in chapter 4). The post independence history of the country is punctuated by notorious scams, involving government development programmes, which resonate in the Indian public consciousness (Jenkins 2007, 59-60). So do corruption scandals concerning military procurement, perhaps most famously the Bofors case involving contracts for artillery pieces for the Indian army (Singh 1997, 633-634). In stories such as these the defence of the nation itself seems threatened by corruption and private influence. Narratives of the unbalanced relationship between the ‘common man’ and those holding political and bureaucratic power have long been staples of literature, film and television (Pinney 2001, 29), reflecting tea shop conversations about corruption, politics and the state taking place across the nation (Gupta 1995; Ruud 2000b). These narratives have been further reinforced by the recent proliferation of news websites and television channels (Thussu 2007) carrying undercover “sting” operations against government ministers and lowly officials alike, a phenomenon which has placed the concept of transparency firmly in the public consciousness (Mazzarella 2006).

So far I have made two initial propositions: that there is a transnational scene directed at promoting transparency, accountability and anti-corruption which incorporates a diverse set of actors and resources; and that globally discourses of transparency,

⁴ See BBC News ‘Death Penalty for China Official’ at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/6699441.stm> accessed 7th May 2009.

⁵ In the US the incoming Obama administration has highlighted transparency and open government as key themes (see http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/TransparencyandOpenGovernment/ last accessed 19th October 2010), while in the UK revelations of British MP’s expenses released in the UK’s Daily Telegraph newspaper during the week beginning the 11th May 2009 caused a storm of media and public comment, acts of contrition and promises of change from all political parties. In April 2010 a further furore erupted after newspapers reported that the 3 MPs actually charged with criminal offences in relation to the misuse of expenses were to receive legal aid.

accountability and corruption, offer frames through which people problematise the state, society and modernity (Herzfeld 1992, 3; Gupta 1995, 385), frames which can structure political contests, policy making and activism. Together these concerns about governance, corruption and a lack of governmental transparency and accountability have produced a contemporary social world of discourses, actors, activities and resources; a ‘field’, in Bourdieu’s sense (1990, 66-68), with which my research can engage.

In the following section I introduce two narratives operative within this field that concern the relationship between state and society and the role of citizens. First I unpack how transparency, accountability and anti-corruption are wrapped up in the good governance paradigm, and show how this paradigm has been incorporated into development policy in India. Then I introduce the mainstreaming of a language of rights in development policy and how this creates a space in discussions about governance for activist groups and NGOs seeking social justice, transparency and accountability. Even though I contrast these narratives my aim will be to reveal a commonality between them around which I base the argument of my thesis.

Two Narratives about the State and Society: Connecting “Good” Governance, Rights and Social Justice

‘Producing and maintaining the distinction between state and society is itself a mechanism that generates resources of power’ (Mitchell 1991, 90)

Transparency, Accountability and Anti-Corruption as part of the Good Governance Paradigm.

Transparency, accountability and anti-corruption, gathered under the conceptually broad umbrella of “good governance”, started to become mainstream in international development in the early 1990’s. Particularly after the publication of the World Bank report ‘Governance and Development’ (World Bank 1992) and the 1996 speech by the bank’s President James Wolfensohn that fighting the ‘cancer of corruption’ and

returning to essential ‘values’ of social justice and equity was a top priority in the banks anti-poverty agenda (Harrison 2004, 138). Earlier thinking about the problem of corruption, and the role of the state in development, within the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) had been led by theories of rent seeking. These assume that governments and their supporters will attempt to maximise monopolies of access to government owned resources for private gain (Krueger 1974; Buchanan, Tollinson, and Tullock 1980; Buchanan 1980) and profoundly influenced the fall from favour of state led growth. Framing states in the developing world as rent seeking institutions contributed to justifications for a move towards the neo-liberal economic orthodoxy that equitable development should be based on a market model and a reduction of the power of the state (Polzer 2001, 7; Bayliss 2006, 147; Corbridge et al. 2005, 154).

However, as Polzer argues, the fall of the Soviet Union and the perceived failure of neo-liberal and cold war driven development aid to make a significant difference, particularly in Africa, offered an opportunity to rethink development priorities and question economic orthodoxies (2001, 8; Fine 2006, 7; Harriss 2001, 115). Criticism of prescriptive neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes from agencies such as UNICEF and the UNDP, and democratisation movements in developing countries demanding greater accountability led donors to take a more moralistic approach (Szeftel 1998, 224). Governance in the developing world was identified as the source of the problem and as the basis for a solution. This allowed a shift of emphasis from the international systemic failures of neo-liberal economic reforms and development aid to localised deficiencies in the state institutions charged with managing processes of adjustment (Polzer 2001, 8; Harrison 2006, 17; Szeftel 1998). In policy terms the perceived need for an efficient, economical and effective state that caters to the needs of citizens as individual consumers, through a responsive and entrepreneurial ‘new public management’, allows a shift in focus away from government, and onto good governance (Chakrabarty 2007, 319)

In this formulation “good” governance appears as a set of features necessary for supporting the development of markets, and providing a stable environment in which

they can function (World Bank 2002, 99), echoing the Weberian maxim that capitalism and rational bureaucracy are symbiotic (Weber 1952, 25; Evans and Rauch 1999).

These features would include some or all of the following: an efficient public service providing value for money; an independent judicial system and a legal framework to enforce property rights; transparent and accountable administration of public funds; a representative legislature; and a pluralistic institutional structure (Leftwich 1995, 427; Khan 2006, 203). Reform is not only expected to come from within the state. There has been encouragement from the international financial institutions of a role for citizens' voices and participation in the direction of poverty policy, which has led to the creation of 'invited spaces' with which actors from 'civil society' might engage (Veneklasen et al. 2004, 5; Gaventa and McGee 2010a, 8). An industry has also grown up to service the new paradigm. A vast body of normative literature, and data in the form of governance indices⁶, has been produced, much of it from within major development donors, associated research institutes and influential NGOs (Harrison 2007, 673).

India's development planning has mirrored the process outlined above, although the problem of governance and administration were major concerns even before the rise of the good governance paradigm. Since independence in 1947 corruption and a lack of transparency and accountability have been identified as problems within the national development agenda (a theme which I will pick up again at the beginning of chapter 5). There have been repeated official attempts to engage with these issues at the national level with commissions of enquiry, government reports and citizens surveys suggesting ways in which to inculcate administrative reforms and moral discipline in politics and the bureaucracy (Gorwala 1951; Government of India, Planning Commission 1952; Appleby 1953; Government of India 1964; Barnabas 1969; Transparency International India 1999, Transparency International India 2005; Government of India 2005).

⁶ For example see the output of the World Bank Institute, in particular the annual World Governance Indicators, or CORIS, the Corruption Online Research Information System hosted by the anti-corruption NGO Transparency International, who also produce the popular annual Corruption Perceptions Index. Other Multi and Bi-lateral donors also maintain websites that disseminate literature relating to anti-corruption and governance, for example see the UK's DFID, The OECD and the UN.

Scholars note the emergence of the idea of India as a ‘rent seeking society’ during the 1980s (Toye 1987, 122-123) and the development of a ‘new economic policy’ to address the issue (Corbridge and Harriss 2003, 102; Corbridge et al. 2005, 157-158). Scrutiny of the Indian government’s Five Year Plans⁷ shows that after the collapse of the Soviet Union (India’s main trading partner) and a balance of payments crisis at the beginning of the 1990’s, which forced a partial liberalisation of its economy, good governance became an increasingly important theme. The Eighth five year plan (1992-1997) reviewed the failures of the license-permit-quota Raj (Government of India 1992, section 1.3.1) in order to address the ‘substantial leakages’ (1992, section 1.3.2) that beset state led development programmes. In the Ninth Plan (1997-2002) the private and NGO sectors were promoted as key providers of public infrastructure (Government of India 1997, sections 3.7.7; 3.7.42), and transparency and greater access to information for the public raised as an issue (1997, sections 2.1.122; 2.1.138). 1997 also saw the Indian government introduce citizen’s charters for its departments (Public Affairs Centre 2007), an attempt to operationalise the New Public Management ethos of citizen as consumer. Anti-corruption NGOs, including some of my informants from Delhi, were given a role in advising on and monitoring the implementation of the charters (2007, 4-5)⁸ The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007), the first to include a dedicated chapter on ‘governance’, specifically related the issues of transparency, the Right to Information, empowerment, anti-corruption and civil service reform to one of its key elements: the success or failure in building capacity in individuals (Government of India 2002, chapter 6 182-187). 2005 saw India’s central Right to Information Act passed (covered in detail in chapter 5) and the formation of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (SARC), charged with reporting on potential improvements to governance. The SARC, a group composed of eminent retired government officers and anti-corruption activists has now produced 12 reports on a range of subjects, including the Right to Information, E-governance, and Ethics in Government (Government of

⁷ Documents produced by the central government Planning Commission, intended to set out the direction for the future development of the nation. The Five Year Plans were introduced immediately after independence in 1947, the current plan is the 11th.

⁸ Also see details of workshops on administrative reform and citizens charters held in Delhi in 2003 at http://www.delhi.gov.in/wps/wcm/connect/doi_ar/Administrative+Reforms/Home/Citizen+Charter/GIST+of+Workshop+on+Citizen+Charter+held+on+13+Feb+03/ (last accessed 12th October 2010)

India 2005), all of which had inputs from civil society groups, including some of my own informants.

Thus internationally and in India we have a good governance paradigm in operation, in which legal mechanisms for transparency and accountability, administrative reform, the provision of choice for citizens as consumers, and the provision of invited spaces for non-governmental actors are important conceptual features in the terrain of development policy making. Now I turn to the issue of rights.

Transparency, Accountability and the Language of Rights

As the Tenth five year plan, outlined above, reflects, recently a focus has also emerged on ‘rights based approaches’ that link development to citizenship, participation and accountability, approaches which ‘have been mainstreamed into the language of donors, governments, development practitioners, and activists’ (Joshi 2010a, 620). In the language of rights, claims for basic needs made by people to their governments are reframed as claims for basic rights. Potential beneficiaries of government programmes are recast as citizens placing the responsibility for providing public goods onto administrations, and onto mechanisms for transparency and accountability that might help citizens to guarantee these rights (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi 2004, 1417-1418). As Chandoke notes, here the state acts as the enabler of active citizenship and ‘civil society’ by providing the politico-legal framework through which rights can be claimed (Chandoke 2003, 243)

Advocates of a rights based approach suggests that resources should be shared more equally and marginalized people given assistance in obtaining their rights (Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall 2004, 2-3). This politicized acknowledgement of the need to consider power within the governance paradigm opens space for the involvement of social movements and activist NGOs who aim to give the poor a voice through collective, or ‘social’ accountability (Houtzager and Joshi 2008; Joshi 2010a; Jenkins and Goetz 1999, Jenkins and Goetz 2003; Jenkins 2007; Mentschel 2005) and draws discursively upon the anti-colonial struggles in which new nation states, and the constitutions that guarantee their citizens’ rights, were formed (Nyamu-Musembi and

Cornwall 2004, 7). Speaking the language of rights also allows funding agencies interested in promoting this approach, the Ford Foundation or Action Aid for example, to get involved in activist driven initiatives from ‘civil society’ which attempt to make the state more accountable through social means⁹. India has a number of interlinked activist led campaigns focusing on Rights to Food, Education, Employment and Information (Harriss 2006, 463) and it is the latter that will be a central focus of my thesis.

There are many involved in initiatives to support citizens’ rights that would be firmly against attempts to tackle governance issues by reducing the size of the state. Many activists that I encountered in Delhi subscribed to the idea that, due to corruption, state welfare programmes had not yet had the opportunity to work. The answer they proposed was to increase public oversight by instituting mechanisms for transparency and social accountability, not by cutting or privatizing the provision of resources. Indeed some had been active in using the Delhi state Right to Information Act (Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi 2001) in fighting a World Bank sponsored initiative exploring the possibility of privatizing Delhi’s water supply¹⁰. However, it is significant that even as these activists disavow a neo-liberal governance agenda, their ability to question the government has, in part, been facilitated by initiatives to implement legal mechanisms for transparency and accountability which facilitate “citizens’ voices” being heard. Many such initiatives have come about, in part, because of pressure placed on national and state governments by institutions such as the World Bank (Gaventa and McGee 2010a, 17; Corbridge et al. 2005, 42-43).

Strong Boundaries: Where Good Governance and the Language of Rights Agree

⁹ See <http://www.fordfoundation.org/issues/human-rights> or (Action Aid 2008). Both of these organisations played a significant role in the activist scene that my thesis describes. Either as direct donors or by funding organisations which in turn funded other initiatives.

¹⁰ See http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/ai/rti/india/states/delhi/rti_spurs_debate_on_world_bank_delhi_water_project.pdf (accessed 14th September 2010) which contains the story of the struggle over the privatisation of public water provision in Delhi, with links to news articles from the time.

The narratives introduced above show that the world that has grown up around governance reform can contain diverse, and perhaps even antagonistic, actors. However, the point I wish to highlight here concerns what these different development actors and activists might agree upon. That is, the belief in the constitutional duties of the state. That it should be the guarantor of citizens' rights, whether that right refers to property or to food and education, that in order to deliver those rights the state should be a disciplined and rational organisation, and that citizens should be disciplined and active in ensuring that their rights are delivered. In order for this to be achieved boundaries between public roles and private interests should be clearly drawn, and transgressions of those boundaries by those with the power or influence to do so illuminated by mechanisms for transparency and accountability (Goetz and Gaventa 2001, 12-13). I am arguing that the concept of an ideal rational-legal state and disciplined society of active citizens is fundamental to the direction of policy and activism that links transparency, accountability and anti-corruption to the promotion of social justice and anti-poverty programmes. This is a discourse about how the state and society *should* relate to each other that requires disciplined boundaries between public and private roles and pathologises the way that many people actually encounter the state in their daily lives.

However, as Corbridge et al note from their research in rural India;

‘the good governance agenda presupposes the construction of a type of individual that is uncommon in our field areas [...] government officers will find it hard to act like a Weberian bureaucrat when they lack the support of a Weberian bureaucracy’ (Corbridge et al. 2005, 152).

It is in exploring this space between the normative and the empirical that my research interest lies. Anthropology is well placed to explore disjunctures between normative conceptions of public behaviour and citizenship and cultural norms concerning power relationships or reciprocity that could be pathologised as opaque or corrupt. An interest in the potential flexibility of the boundaries between public and private can reveal the strategies that people, *including transparency and accountability activists*, might have

to employ at the everyday level to ‘get their work done’. To open up this discussion further in the following section I introduce two related strands of ethnographic writing that my research has been inspired by and draws upon, but which I am *not* attempting to replicate. These are ethnographies of the everyday state and society, and ethnographies of corruption.

Intersections and Imaginations of State and Society: An Ethnographic View.

In this section I present a review of key ethnographic texts concerning the ‘every day state and society’ which support a number of themes that will recur through my ethnographic chapters. I draw on texts that deal with India, but where appropriate I also reference literature from other parts of the world. In contrast to normative and idealised conceptualisations of how states *should* function, ethnographic studies contribute to our understanding of the different and complicated ways in which people *actually* encounter and interact with the state. Viewed from the local level the separation between the state (*sarkar* in Hindi) and the people it governs becomes fuzzy and ambiguous as power relations and discourses of morality and legitimacy are interpreted through local structures and idioms (Osella and Osella 2000, 137-138). For my activist informants many of the practices described below would be taken as explicit examples of problems that need to be solved, examples of the dysfunctional influence of factors such as class, caste and personal discretion over the distribution of government resources and the provision of constitutional rights. But this is precisely why these ethnographies are so important to my analysis of transparency and accountability activism. My informants’ activism is aimed at disciplining the everyday state and society on the one hand, and on the other at transcending the barriers of class and caste that impact the ability of Indian people to be active citizens, as required by the good governance and rights agendas. They might imagine the possibility of an ideal state and society, but it is the everyday state and society that is the raw material, the ‘ground realities’, with which activists work. It is here, in the practice of dealing with ground realities, that boundary paradoxes emerge.

I will begin with work that draws out the theme of boundaries and connections between state and society and the fuzzy nature of the public-private divide. This will lead to my second theme of mediation, the role of brokers between state and society and their role in the implementation of government schemes. My third theme concerns the ways that people imagine the state through narratives in public culture. The last theme addresses the material state, that is, how the state becomes manifest in paper processes, offices, stored information and forms of expert knowledge, and the role of the state in bio-political schemes. These themes are closely interrelated. I will provide ethnographic examples for each of them in the knowledge that the themes cannot easily be separated out from each other. As a central text which draws together all of the themes that I address here, I would like to acknowledge the influence of Fuller and Benei's edited volume 'The Everyday State and Society in Modern India' (2000) on my research and analysis. I take my use of the term every day state and society in this thesis from this volume, but also apply it as a generic term to similar themes addressed in a body of related literature, for example, ethnographic work that concerns low level corruption.

Boundaries and Connections

In his paper on the 'public-private divide in local Indian society' (2000a) Arild Engelsen Ruud provides us with a view of local practices in West Bengal which could be construed as corrupt if a policy oriented and development donor driven view of the public-private divide were applied (2000a, 273). For Ruud this universalistic view does not sufficiently take into account how local norms of obligation and reciprocity may apply. He highlights the importance of social networking to people's strategies for securing low level government employment. The building and maintenance of social relations with those who may be able to assist plays an important role in attempts to deal with and penetrate what he calls the 'government machinery' (2000a, 276). Ruud offers the stories of two men attempting to secure government positions. Uttam is personally charming and a keen social networker who consciously builds a pool of contacts who may be able to help him get an interview for a job as a schoolteacher. Despite many attempts Uttam fails to make any headway until he meets an acquaintance, the cousin of a university friend, who reveals how he found his way

around the same bureaucratic problem. The acquaintance kindly arranges a meeting with the correct official and helps to negotiate the transaction of a payment to facilitate the addition of Uttam's name to interview lists for several schools. Uttam's assiduous maintenance of his *atmiya-swajan* (network of 'kins and likes') has helped him to penetrate the state system and ultimately achieves a successful result (2000a, 276-277).

The story of Kalo, an educated Bengali man trying to secure a relatively low level position at a local hospital shows a different outcome. Kalo attempts to use a series of contacts to try to influence the outcome of his application. The first contact, through a friend, leads him to the person in charge of the selection process, but the latter takes an ethical stance and is unwilling to indulge in any favouritism (2000a, 278). The next connections, also through friends, are to brokers who say that they can make arrangements, but their price is too high (2000a, 279). As a last resort Kalo contacts his brother in law Nikhil, a well connected journalist in Calcutta with friends high up in the ruling communist party. Nikhil is ideologically committed to the party's attempts to provide a clean government, but under great pressure to help a family member he initially agrees to try. However when Kalo travels to Calcutta to see him and make arrangements Nikhil flees his home rather than face him. Nikhil later made it clear to Ruud that his ultimate reason for not helping Kalo was his embarrassment at asking a highly placed friend for help in securing such a low position. His failure to help his sister's family led to a break off in relations for several years, which only highlights the pressure that this type of conflict may place on people (2000a, 280-281).

The distinction between public and private roles for Ruud's informants is real but malleable. They are conscious that public roles may be subverted by bribery or *bhrastachar* (corruption) and generally condemn those who take bribes as immoral. However, their condemnation is inconsistent as they present the use of contacts and networking as morally acceptable, as a sign of cunning and performative skill. Ruud presents us with situations in which the existence of a public-private divide is widely understood and knowingly crossed. What is significant is that the reason for crossing

and the manner in which it is done are both related to whether the act is seen as legitimate or not by differently positioned actors in particular situations (2000a, 283).

Akhil Gupta's classic paper 'Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State' (1995) provides another view of these public-private crossings, this time from rural Uttar Pradesh. His ethnography gives us an insight into the workings of a land registry office in a small town. The office is run by Sharmaji, a *Patwari*, a relatively low level official who nonetheless wields considerable power in his role as the arbiter of local land disputes and the person through which the ownership of land is established. Sharmaji's house is located deep within the old part of town in an inconspicuous building, the front room of which, opening onto the street, serves as his office. The office acts both as waiting room and as Sharmaji's court in which disputes are settled within earshot, and often with the active participation, of the waiting farmers. Farmland is the principal means of production in the area and all of the transactions carried out by Sharmaji, including out of office duties such as inspecting and adjudicating land encroachments entail the paying of a bribe. The rates for these transactions are mostly fixed and well known (1995, 379). Sharmaji's office registers land for five or six villages outside the town, and he is clearly using his monopoly over land registry in the area as an economic resource, however as Gupta points out, in Sharmaji's office offering a bribe requires 'a great degree of performative competence' (1995, 381). Two young men attempting to get a name added to the title deeds of their land visit the office but botch the paying of the necessary bribe by a clumsy attempt that makes it appear as exactly that, a bribe, rather than a gesture of goodwill and respect to the position of the *Patwari* (1995, 379). The young men fail to achieve their aim not because they lack the money to pay the bribe but because they lack the 'cultural capital' (1995, 381) to succeed in the negotiation of it.

Sharmaji's home/office encapsulates the blurred boundary between state and society. Important local government work is done there, but in the vernacular of family and friendship and favour. Gupta shows us that in everyday encounters with the state in

India knowing how to get work expedited, the ability to play the game with skill, or even to get an audience with the correct official can be connected to social status, to class, caste and local politics. To master the game takes contacts and experience that many may not have access to (Ruud 2000a, 289; Osella and Osella 2000, 149-150) .

In my thesis I pick up the theme of boundaries and connection in chapter 2 as I introduce Delhi as a city and a socially divided space. Official plans for the development of the city have been blurred and subverted by unofficial practices. Civil servants and members of the public come to temporary agreements over the way that spaces in the city are used. These agreements have enabled the proliferation of ‘unauthorised’ structures, dwellings and commercial spaces, many built in the hope that what is allowed unofficially may be ‘regularised’ in the future. In chapter 4 I bring in narratives of corruption and connection from the city that both celebrate and deplore the possibilities that the blurred boundaries between public and private roles offer to those able to negotiate them. In chapter 5 connections between activists, politicians and bureaucrats, the everyday state and society at an elite level, emerge as important factors in the passage of legal mechanisms for transparency and accountability. And, in chapter 8, connections, personal recommendations and patron-client relations are revealed to be essential in the organisation of funding for activism. Now I turn to my second theme.

Mediation

The perception of a need for contacts inside the state system that might help to negotiate the difficult crossing of the public-private divide is often keenly felt. For many families in India enabling access to the state by securing a government position for a family member may be part of a household strategy. A government post can provide a guaranteed income but it also offers the possibility of becoming involved in mediation for family, caste or community members. As Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery note in their work on schooling in Uttar Pradesh high caste *Jat* families are willing to invest in education for their sons in the hope that they might find salaried employment of which government service is the most prestigious as it provides a pension and ‘over-income’ based on the collection of kickbacks and family access to welfare programmes

(2005, 2090-2091 also see; Jeffrey 2002; Jeffrey and Lerche 2000, 97-100). Similarly, educated Dalit men who had secured government jobs act, albeit in a limited way, as intermediaries with the local state providing leverage for people from their community (Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2005, 2097). Local politicians affiliated to particular caste groups can also be useful where a 'link' with an MLA or MP can translate into 'the expectation that the politician will assist as far as possible in "getting work done" by ensuring the cooperation of state officials' (Jeffrey and Lerche 2000, 100).

Where these types of connections or political affiliations are not available a lack of competence in dealing with the bureaucracy has led many Indians to seek other means in their transactions with the state. The unpleasantness of personally negotiating the public-private boundary or the problem of getting information about how to gain access to jobs or the schemes that the government offers might be lessened with the help of a skilled *dalaal* (broker/agent).

Corbridge and Kumar (2002) provide an example from the timber trade in Jharkhand state. Polus B, a literate member of an *adivasi* community employed by the government as a school master in his village decides to fell 10 Jackfruit trees on his land and sell them, either to the state forest department or to a private timber merchant. The forest management regulations demand that permits are obtained for the felling of particular trees and the transportation and selling of the timber (2002, 771). The permits would require a great deal of work to organize and Polus B would have to go through the time-consuming, and occasionally humiliating, procedure of dealing with the Deputy Forest Officer's (DFO) office in the district capital Ranchi. Polus B lacks the time and social capital to undertake this process easily and so employs the services of a *dalaal*, to undertake the work for him. Polus B sells the trees to the *dalaal* for 20,000 rupees, despite their real worth being over Rs100,000, partly in recognition of the amounts that the *dalaal* would have to pay in bribes and commission to put the sale through (2002, 772).

This story can easily be cast as an example of the overbearing state in India, a late manifestation of the ‘license/permit Raj’ (Parry 2000, 29) so vilified by commentators on pre-liberalization corruption (Gill 1998), or perhaps as the exploitation of unsophisticated *Adivasis* by well connected brokers. However as Robbins points out these transactions are often carried out with people with whom there is some level of trust already established (2000, 427), and this is the case with the selling of Polus B’s trees. The *dalaal* in this case was an *adivasi* man from Polus B’s own village, a man who had spent a great deal of time building up the contacts with the relevant officials and who already had an established reputation for bringing *sarkar* (government) to the village in the form of development funds for drinking wells and low income housing. The *dalaal* also had good connections to the local political networks and members of parliament and took on the task of ensuring votes at election time. Thus for Polus B, approaching the *dalaal* for assistance was a natural solution to his problem (Corbridge and Kumar 2002, 775)

Corbridge and Kumar present a picture of the *dalaals* involved in the forest trade as a ‘community’ (2002, 777), a group with a collective interest in maintaining a particular status quo, working openly enough to be vocal in calling for the re-nationalisation of the tree trade after the transit permit system was temporarily removed for some species of trees in the mid-1990s (2002, 777, 782). Here the *dalaals* link the villagers to the state and development in much the same way that ‘Development Brokers’ do in parts of Africa (Bierschenk, Chaveau, and Olivier de Sardan 2000) or as Nuijten’s (2003) work shows for farmers in Mexico. They dominate the relationship between the villages and the state system through a network of unequal exchanges in which the villagers are ultimately the losers, but at the same time the *Dalaal*’s expert knowledge about how best to engage with the local state legitimises their status and role in the local communities (Corbridge and Kumar 2002, 777).

Dalaals also make an appearance in Jonathan Parry’s (2000) ethnography of a central government run steel plant in Bhilai, Madhya Pradesh. But, as in Ruud’s work in West Bengal (2000a), Parry’s informants do not regard *dalaals* so much as legitimate mediators with the state but rather as a last resort to be used when all other avenues

have failed (2000, 36). The squeeze on spending that followed the liberalisation of government industries in the early 1990s made competition for the secure and pensioned jobs at the steel plant intense. To get any job at the plant a 'source' is seen as essential and finding a contact who can help in the selection process is perceived as the only way to move ahead (2000, 32). If no source is available then a *dalaal* may have to be used. Although money ('notes') must now change hands, appearances are still important;

'The etiquette of the transaction often seems to require that both parties should maintain the polite fiction that the "eater" of notes is merely a "source" who simply does one a favour by passing them up through the "proper channel". A largely impersonal transaction is thus transformed into personal act of friendship, permitting everybody to pretend that the recipient is a man of integrity and the deal only slightly beyond what is proper' (2000, 33)

Despite the appearance of friendship the *dalaal* is most often a comparative stranger, but one who is part of the broad network of family or friends, which allows some leverage in the event that the attempt is unsuccessful. While not exactly secret, the *dalaal*'s business is not carried out in the open so that the ability of friends or family to vouch for him is essential (2000, 36); a marked contrast to Corbridge and Kumar's portrayal of the status of the *dalaal* in Jharkhand (2002, 777).

For Parry, that these transactions operate with such low levels of trust is a sign of the desperation of those faced with the possibility of a lifetime of low status work in the informal economy, coupled with an 'unshakeable' conviction that this is the only way in which a decent job can be acquired (2000, 36). If the attempt fails then the applicants may speculate as to why this has happened; perhaps the *dalaal* has "eaten" the money, the higher officials at the steel works were too greedy and the money not enough, there were too many bribes chasing too few jobs. In every speculation the idea that corruption is the only route to success is preserved and reinforced (2000, 37).

Parry proposes that the perception of corruption is much higher than its actual incidence. That people believe that they require the services of a *dalaal* highlights the widespread sense of a ‘crisis of corruption’ in India. But, despite widespread cynicism about the appointments system amongst those working in the steel plant very few of the many informants with which he discussed the means by which they got their own job mentioned money, even when asked directly, although many did acknowledge a “source”. In fact he notes that during many conversations with workers they would say with great surprise and without prompting that they had got the job without paying anything at all, as if this was a rare event (2000, 39).

As this and the other work reviewed here shows, pragmatic attempts to engage with the state as it is encountered locally do not mean that people fail to recognise a boundary between public and private roles, or are not aggrieved at having to pay money to an intermediary. They are aware that modern impersonal norms of rational bureaucracy are supposed to apply in government offices and processes (Fuller and Harriss 2000, 23). As Parry finds, when it comes to the payments regarded as necessary to influence those in office his informants did not take a morally neutral stance, ‘especially when the office is somebody else’s and it is they who are providing the perks’ (2000, 29).

The theme of mediation will emerge most strongly in my discussion of the work of local Right to Information *sangathans* (grassroots organisations). In chapters 5 and 6 we see how activist groups have developed strategies which utilise the Right to Information to help Indian citizens intercede with bureaucratic delays, and to avoid the paying of bribes to officials or *dalaals*. The aim is to persuade the public that they can be their own broker in dealings with the local state. However, many of those who come to Right to Information groups for help lack the confidence or literacy necessary to follow the bureaucratic process of filing a Right to Information application or lodging a complaint. Thus activists find themselves playing the role of brokers, albeit honest ones. What activists have in common with *dalaals* is the expert knowledge that both possess about the workings of the local state. Mediation is also a significant theme in chapter 7 as I introduce activist ‘success stories’. These are stories produced to

advertise the work of activist groups and act as object lessons in active citizenship. The narratives introduce protagonists who are empowered by their Right to Information to solve problems with local state agencies without mediation, and frame the activist imagination of the appropriate relationship between state and society. This brings me to my third theme, the way in which the state and society are discursively constructed in public culture.

Imagining the Everyday State and Society.

In tune with Parry's (2000) work on mediation and the perception of corruption Akhil Gupta highlights a popular perception of crisis in his analysis of local and national newspaper stories about corruption. He argues that a 'discourse of corruption' is constructed in public culture which helps people to imagine the state, citizenship and standards of accountability. Gupta notices two strands. The national, metropolitan based press tends to focus on big scandals in government procurement and welfare schemes, often blamed on failures of implementation at the local level. Meanwhile the local vernacular press present a richer picture of the everyday state by focusing on local corruption stories in great detail, often naming officials in person (1995, 386-387)¹¹. These reports construct the state as a collection of different and uncoordinated institutions staffed by unaccountable and un-sackable employees, and citizens as 'exploited, powerless and outraged' (1995, 388). As Gupta argues elsewhere, corruption is 'a fecund signifier because it serves as a site for debates prompted by conflicting systems of moral and ethical behaviour' (2005, 175). The global concern over corruption and a lack of transparency is an accretion of multiple and localised narratives, 'modernist imaginations' (2005, 175) through which we constitute the state and proper public and private roles. For Gupta, expectations of correct behaviour and standards of accountability for public officials come both from the state and different social groups but these expectations may not necessarily converge. The way that people employ discourses of corruption and accountability are mediated by their 'structural location'. This includes state officials who are positioned in different ways within

¹¹ Gupta is writing prior to the great rise in the number of TV rolling news channels and the focus on local corruption stories in urban areas. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 4.

regimes of power and are subject to differing discourses of accountability and legitimacy (1995, 388)¹².

Thomas Blom Hansen's work on governance and violence in Mumbai offers another view of these imaginaries. He argues that the 'myth of the state', that is its popular image as a symbol of national secular modernity and guarantor of social order and justice (2001, 126, 2000, 32), has been imbued with sublime qualities. He goes on

'The bureaucrat, the planner and the scientist, the member of the Indian Administrative Service [...] occupy crucial positions in contemporary political imaginaries, not least for the large middle class' (2000, 37)

He contrasts this with the 'profane' dimension of the state which encompasses the 'incoherence, brutality, partiality and banality of the technical sides of governance' (2000, 35). In this distinction Hansen echoes Abrams' assertion that

'the state is [...] an ideological artefact attributing unity, morality and independence to the disunited, amoral and dependent workings of the practice of government' (1988, 81).

However, Hansen argues that, in extremis, the sublime myth of the state may be shattered by violence in which state officials, in this case the police, side with particular communities or political blocs. In turn this may prompt attempts to rebuild the public imagination of the state as sublime through public spectacles of accountability such as commissions of enquiry and judicial processes (2000, 38). However he finds that even as attempts are made to defuse communal conflicts and restore public confidence in the idea of the state as the guardian of social order, the processes and spaces for transparency and accountability that are created become politicized by local conflicts (Hansen 2000, 38-40). Thus work on the everyday state and society shows us how the powerful imagination of an ideal, impersonal state disembedded and separate from society can exist in vernacular culture, but also how this view can be fragile, dependant on context and open to challenge by competing discourses of accountability.

¹² The short paper by Price (1999) about the connection between cosmology and corruption in which she applies concepts of *dharma* (correct action) and kingship to the workings of bureaucracy in south India is interesting in this respect.

Inevitably imaginations of the everyday state and society are woven throughout my thesis. In chapters 4 and 7 in particular these imaginations emerge through my focus on rhetorical narratives about active citizenship, rights, corruption and connection; and in chapters 5 and 6 through my focus on the everyday strategies and practices of Right to Information activism. I would argue that to be involved in transparency and accountability activism is to be involved in projects in which representations and imaginations of the state and society are used as symbolic resources and justifications for action (Sampson 1996, 122).

So far I have discussed how the idea of a boundary between public and private roles and between state and society may be widely understood in India but applied flexibly by people in their daily lives. Social positioning such as caste and class, the maintenance of social networks, performative skill and the widespread belief in a crisis of corruption all affect the way that people attempt to negotiate encounters with officials. I have also discussed how the state is discursively constructed and mythologised as an institution separate from society that is organised around particular ethical and impersonal imperatives and with the development of the nation and the protection of citizens' rights as its *raison d'être*. These discussions might give the impression that the state does not really exist in a tangible way, comprising instead of the interplay of localised political practices on the one hand and an ideology on the other. In the next section I will address this issue by turning to the physical existence of the state.

The Material State and Technologies of Rule.

Ethnographic work on the everyday state and society helps us to develop an understanding that the state and society cannot be distinguished from one another. At the same time it illuminates the difference between a state-idea and a state-system (Abrams 1988, 82), the difference between the sublime state of the imagination and the profane state of the daily practices of government (Hansen 2000). As Fuller and Harriss point out following Mitchell (1991) 'in making sense of the modern nation state in India it is vital to recognise that it is precisely that – modern, national and a state'

(2000, 23). It has all the institutions that a nation state should have such as an army, schools, a bureaucracy and territorial borders. Even if the state and society can not be separated analytically then through its offices, notice boards and demands that citizens exist on paper as well as in person, it can often appear to people as ‘a sovereign entity set apart from society by an *internal* boundary that seems to be as real as its external boundary’ (2000, 23 italics in original). I will now turn to scholarship which brings out this material aspect of the state.

Emma Tarlo’s work on ‘paper truths’ and the forgotten files concerning slum clearances and sterilisation programmes in Emergency era Delhi provides compelling descriptions of an east Delhi zonal office of the ‘slum wing’ of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) (2000a, 73-74, 2003, 66-68). The office is decrepit with broken windows and no electricity. Pigeons nest amongst the files piled high in the storeroom and next door ‘officials cluster in marginally better conditions, staving off a lethal combination of boredom and heat’ (2000a, 74). Tarlo has visited the office to look at files relating to the resettlement of slum-dwellers from Delhi’s old city across the Yamuna river into Welcome Colony, now part of east Delhi, during the period of emergency rule in the late 1970s (2000b, 2003).

The files are personal records each of which pertains to a particular resettlement plot in Welcome colony. Families whose dwellings had been demolished as part of slum clearance policy would be allotted a 25 square yard plot in the new colony on which to build a dwelling. Most files contained a number of documents relating to the allottee, a demolition slip, an allotment order, a photograph of the allottee, affidavits and receipts for payment of license fees (2000a, 76). Some also contained papers relating to government family planning programmes as in some cases plots had been allotted in return for the allottee agreeing to sterilization (2003, 79-83).

Tarlo notes that in theory the files offer an uncomplicated ‘official’ reading of the allotment of a resettlement plot according to the policy of the time. However there was considerable slippage between these official accounts and the everyday reality,

something that the lower level clerks in the office were helpful in explaining. Often plots were not occupied by the official allottee but had been rented out or sold on. Unofficially the slum department would ignore these cases if the occupier could produce the original allotment documents and pay the license fee. Where the slum department became officially aware of the transfer of a plot the occupier would rarely be evicted but instead recognised as ‘unauthorized occupants’ and charged monthly damages at roughly three times the rate of the official monthly license fee (2000a, 77-78).

The Emergency era sterilisation drives and their link to slum clearances have become notorious through fictionalised accounts (Mistry 1996; Rushdie 1981) but Tarlo offers a more complicated reading. The files use two phrases to refer to sterilisation: ‘self sterilization’ or ‘motivated case’. Tarlo’s enquiries revealed that many plots were allotted, or ‘regularised’ in the case of unauthorised occupation, on the basis that the person applying for the plot could persuade another to be sterilised in their place. About half of the sterilisation cases that Tarlo uncovered in Welcome were ‘motivated’ (2000a, 80). As pressure to reach sterilisation targets increased nationally during the Emergency the Delhi government increasingly targeted those, like many in Welcome Colony, who were living between ‘official policies and officially recognised irregularities’ (2000a, 83). Tarlo notes that at first sight the policy to increase sterilisation cases appears to move downwards through a pyramid of bureaucratic power until finally it is implemented at the lower levels impacting the poorest families in the city. But at the same time strategies such as the organisation of motivated cases show how the poor manage to make deals which allow them to flexibly avoid the imperative of policy (2000a, 83).

Tarlo’s work is interesting because, in contrast to other work on the everyday state and society cited above, it introduces us to the paper world of the state and to biopolitical schemes to administrate the population (Corbridge et al. 2005, 15; Gupta 2001, 66). It investigates the files and procedures that have to be filled and followed, the ‘banal repetition of everyday actions, and the mundane realities of following precedent’ in

which the state is reproduced as an institution (Sharma and Gupta 2006, 13). As Hull notes in his work on the post-colonial bureaucracy in Pakistan, the production of official artefacts, such as files, and the practice of official writing are essential to the way that official knowledge is produced. Writing becomes an instrument of control over knowledge and the storage of information (Hull 2008, 503, 2003). Documentation and official status take on practical and symbolic significance for people as they attempt to position themselves as beneficiaries of government development schemes or avoid the authorities obtaining too much information about them. The privileging of writing and documentation as ways of producing knowledge also makes literacy central to schemes that seek to empower people as citizens who might watch over the state (Sharma and Gupta 2006, 14-15).

The importance of writing and official *khagaz* (paper) to activist projects cannot be overstated. In chapters 5 and 6 in particular I show how Right to Information activists focus on documentation and paper trails in their attempts to discipline the everyday state and society. Literacy is a pre-requisite for those who seek to write applications, prepare legal cases and analyse government files. In fact much of the day to day activity of activist groups working at the grassroots involves preparing and checking government forms, or writing complaints, for clients. Thus transparency and accountability activists have a role in making people visible to the state as they help prepare applications for ration cards, voter registrations, birth and caste certificates and similar documents that allow access to state welfare schemes. Citizens then, to some extent, are made on paper and documents help to determine how the state ‘sees’ people (Scott 1998), but not necessarily, as Corbridge et al (2005) point out, how people see the state. This brings me to a last key text, and returns us to the earlier discussion of good governance and rights.

As Corbridge et al note in ‘Seeing the State’:

‘state-poor encounters are now being restructured to some degree by new technologies of rule that seek (or claim) to produce members of the rural poor as clients of the

government and as active participants in their own empowerment' (Corbridge et al. 2005, 6 parentheses in original)

These technologies are part of the 'new public administration' which seeks to make government more streamlined and responsive, but also requires active citizens to participate in processes of accountability (Chakrabarty 2007, 317). New technologies of rule manifest themselves in participatory development schemes led by international development actors and the Indian government, working in conjunction with NGOs, and in employment schemes implemented by government ministries. Following from the perspectives outlined in ethnographic work on the everyday state and society Corbridge et al are interested in the ways that these schemes are interpreted and put into action by low level government workers (2005, 7).

There is no space here to summarise this very detailed work, which is the result of engagement with research council and DFID funded research projects into the implementation of government schemes to guarantee primary education and employment in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. However the central aspect of the authors' approach is worth highlighting, that is its focus on the different 'sightings of the state' that people may take. 'Seeing the State' adapts its title from James Scott's (1998) work 'Seeing Like a State' in which he describes the development of the modern-rational nation state as a system which surveys, inspects, quantifies, analyses populations. Corbridge et al look instead at the ways that the state 'comes into view', particularly for those who seek entitlements from it (2005, 7). For Corbridge et al different people will sight the state in different ways depending on their social position and the experience of the state of those around them. They go on to note that;

'part of the attraction of the new public administration is that it expects a tribal woman in eastern India, lets say, to see the state in terms of corruption or extortion, as well as of gender bias and a propensity for ad hoc or personalized rule. It then 'follows' that she can be empowered by the exit option or by a decentralised form of rule that makes the state accountable to citizens on the basis of their statutory (and thus in some respects equal) rights' (2005, 8 parentheses in original).

While the authors do not necessarily share this optimism they do not dismiss it either, preferring to engage with the question through their investigation of 'how government

works in practice’ (2005, 8-9). In other words through a focus on how new technologies of rule, in this case development schemes informed by the good governance and rights agendas, interact with the everyday state and society in India.

This rich work on the implementation of new technologies of rule, and the possibility of the creation of new citizens capable of interacting with them, points me towards my own area of research. Ethnographic work on the everyday state and society usefully shows us how government works in practice. Without dismissing corruption or unequal access to the public goods that the state provides as irrelevant it offers a counterpoint to government, donor and activist led ‘boosterism’ (Corbridge et al. 2005, 5) which suggests that new mechanisms for transparency, accountability and active citizenship will necessarily lead to the empowerment of citizens. My overall aim in this thesis is to take work on the everyday state and society in India as a point of departure and investigate not how everyday government works in practice, but, how some everyday attempts to reform government and create ‘exit options’ (2005, 8) related to transparency, accountability and anti-corruption work in practice.

Thinking with Transparency and Accountability

I have said that this is *not* to be an ethnography of the state, or of corruption. While considerations of both have played a significant role in the development of my study, and literature that engages with both is essential to the empirical and theoretical background to the work, it has not been my intention to investigate either topic directly. Instead the study was originally intended as an ethnography of “anti-corruption”, which in the field has been partially superseded by a focus on transparency and accountability. The reasons for this are both practical and methodological.

I found as I began to engage with my field site and informants that ‘anti-corruption’, a recognisable concept when viewed from a distance and made more solid by the writing of a research proposal, partially disappeared from view when encountered through ethnographic fieldwork. Just as a forest appears as a coherent whole from a distance, but close up can be seen as individual trees; so, anti-corruption is made up of a number

of different and undefined concepts that my informants present as normative goals or outcomes of their work. Among these we might include improvements in transparency, accountability, empowerment, participation and human rights. I also found that for explaining my work to potential contacts ‘anti-corruption’ as a term was far too awkward to be really useful in the field. ‘Corruption’ is a very loud word, drowning out others around it, and I quickly regretted having used it in my early attempts to make contacts. Later in my fieldwork I would occasionally be haunted by the introduction ‘this is Martin, he is studying corruption’. It is true that I am interested in how people talk about corruption as revealing of how they understand the relationship between state and society (see chapter 4), but it has never been my intention to study directly practices that might be considered corrupt according to a particular definition. Thus although my informants are, often explicitly, involved in doing anti-corruption work, a focus on the dyad of transparency and accountability is what emerges from my study of the practices of anti-corruption in the field. I am treating transparency and accountability as a dyad because, although they are not synonymous, in the everyday discourse of my activist informants the boundary between the two is extremely blurred.

Transparency and accountability are ideas that ethnographic research can engage with well. They are not only technical concepts realisable as legal mechanisms, for example in the Right to Information, to be applied to the machine of government (see chapters 5 and 6), but are also highly flexible and personal *qualities*. Transparency and accountability can be embodied, performed, negotiated or employed as verbal weapons in accusation (see chapter 7). They can be used rhetorically or reflexively, and be made into public virtues, taking a central role in ethical statements on activism and research, and as prerequisites for gaining access to funding (see chapters 7 and 8).

Anthropology has paid a good degree of attention to transparency and accountability. Marilyn Strathern’s edited volume ‘Audit Cultures’ (2000b) introduces papers that examine the spread of accountability mechanisms in western financial, governmental and academic institutions, the rise of a ‘new managerialism’ (Shore and Wright 2000, 63-67), and administrative attempts to track performance and link accountability to

ethical codes. These efforts at social engineering have been criticised by some as a new form of “tyranny”. Tsoukas (1997) and Strathern (2000a) both argue that increased availability of information, and claims that transparency is automatically benevolent, moral and leads to the rational management of social problems, are less innocent than they appear. In this vein some commentators link transparency and accountability mechanisms, and claims that they offer empowerment, to a neo-liberal agenda, and to Foucault’s (1991) notion of governmentality (Shore and Roberts 1993; Shore and Wright 1999; Tsoukas 1997, 831; Corbridge et al. 2005).

Summarised, Foucault’s argument is that in the modern era the rationality of government has shifted in focus from maintaining sovereignty over territory towards the management of populations and their health, wealth, fertility, education and moral conduct. Control over the human body has become the central focus of state discipline and surveillance (Shore and Wright 1997, 30). Governmentality appears as a continuum linking political ‘technologies of dominating others’ (Pels 2000, 137) to ‘technologies of the self’, the ways in which individual subjects regulate their own behaviour and take responsibility for their own ‘self care’ (Lemke 2002, 59; Dean 1999, 12). Crucial to these technologies is the concept of ‘gaze’ (Foucault 1977, 171), that is, techniques for ensuring the visibility of individuals through surveillance, examination and documentation (Foucault 1977, 184-192; Cooper 1997, 34). As legal mechanisms and embodied virtues, transparency and accountability might be encountered as technologies of rule, and of the self, and as mechanisms designed to facilitate gaze. All of these aspects are linked to the production of modern and active citizens.

In their 2003 edited volume West and Sanders approach transparency from a different direction by pairing it with conspiracy. Claims to transparency and suspicions of conspiracy are both presented as ideological formations (Sanders and West 2003, 15), as ‘ideoscapes’ (Appadurai 1996, 35-36) that reveal the topography of ‘multiple modernities’ (Sanders and West 2003, 9). In a variety of cultural settings claims to transparency and rationality linked to states and new political and economic orders are contrasted with equally modern ‘occult cosmologies’ (2003, 6). These provide different

readings of power relations, attributing outcomes to conspiracies, secret, mysterious or unseen powers (2003, 7) as people strive to be modern but on their own terms (2003, 7).

These are useful ideas, and important to the development of my thesis. My informants' attempts to use Right to Information legislation as a means of disciplining government representatives suggests a process in which an examining 'gaze' (Foucault 1977, 171) is turned upon the state. Activists working alone, or as part of local groups, which in turn may be part of larger campaigns, use legislation such as the Right to Information in attempts to audit public expenditure and trace the passage of official work through the government system. The aim is to educate officials and the public to act in a disciplined manner (I will address this topic in detail in chapters 5 and 6).

Narratives of transparency and conspiracy also play a part in my thesis; however my informants do not invoke occult powers or cosmologies. Rather a lack of transparency and accountability are cast as facets of an unethical world in which reason and equality of opportunity are prevented by conspiracy, private interest and opacity. Where power is exercised through 'crony capitalism' (Kahn and Formosa 2002) and lies in that which is sinisterly referred to as the 'nexus' between politics, the bureaucracy, business and crime (Srivastava 2001, 132) (In particular see chapters 4, 5 and 7).

Transparency and accountability activism in India has already been the subject of scholarship, mostly from within political science and development studies. Rob Jenkins and Anne-Marie Goetz have examined the work of the *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (Labourers and Farmers Power Organisation), otherwise known as the MKSS, in Rajasthan (Jenkins and Goetz 1999, 2003; Jenkins 2004; Goetz and Jenkins 2001, 2005), as has Stefan Mentschel (2005). Some attention has also been paid to Right to Information activism in Delhi in the work of Goetz and Jenkins (2005), Jenkins (2007), Pande (2008), Baviskar (2010) and Corbridge et al (2005, 219-224). These are valuable contributions and I have drawn on the work of these authors in my thesis, particularly in chapter 5. However, perhaps due to disciplinary interests, these

authors mostly confine themselves to analysis of activist groups as examples of collective action and do not often explore below the surface representations of groups to show the power relationships at work within activism, or reveal the different motivations that lead people to enrol in activist projects. Thus, building on the scholarship of these authors, my ethnographic work offers a novel perspective on transparency and accountability activism in India.

As Sanders and West point out;

‘transparency is invoked by those who think of themselves as modern as they talk about their vision of a modern society [...] a social world whose workings are transparent to all is a social world that is amenable to the dictates of reason, arrived at openly through the dictates of irrefutable logic validated by societies sovereign subjects themselves.’
(2003, 7)

Transparency, accountability and anti-corruption activism involves projects aimed at steering state and society towards a modernity that is constructed through the practices of active citizenship. As sets of discourses and practices through which people imagine, and attempt to rework, power relations, activism problematises the everyday state and society in India and attempts to effect incremental changes. Through my thesis I will argue that the projects that my activist informants carry out in Delhi are concerned with boundaries of different kinds. By campaigning for legal mechanisms for transparency and accountability activists attempt to illuminate and delineate boundaries between state and society, public and private, and enable active citizens to direct a disciplining gaze at the state and society. This is work directed at bringing blurred boundaries into sharp focus, making transparent and rational that which is opaque, personalised and politicised. At the same time activists are also concerned with attempts to transcend the visible and palpable boundaries between social classes and spaces in the city in order to encourage and enable participation in the project of active citizenship.

Research Questions.

These two aspects frame the research questions with which my thesis will engage.

These questions are not directed at assessing the work that my activist informants do in

terms of success or failure. To paraphrase David Mosse, the ethnographic question is not whether but *how* activist projects work; not whether a project succeeds but how success is produced (2004, 646)¹³. Thus my central question is:

If activism is directed at producing a future that conforms to activist's ideal constructions of how India should be, then how must activists work in the present to bring this future about?

This can be broken down into a number of sub questions that relate to the specific context of my work in Delhi, such as:

How do transparency and accountability activists encounter, and negotiate, boundaries and connections in the course of their work?

What role do factors related to class, gender, social and cultural capital and the spatialised hierarchies of Delhi play in the everyday life and organisation of transparency and accountability activism?

How do activists deploy rhetoric, narrative and performance to sustain support for their projects?

And, how do activists negotiate intra-scene power relationships and networks of support in order to sustain a full time engagement with activism?

Revealing Ground Realities and Boundary Paradoxes: The Structure of the Thesis.

In chapter 2 I introduce Delhi as a city and locate myself within it. The city itself is an important character in my narrative and this chapter is not about transparency and accountability activism per se. Delhi's physical and social development, and related political arguments over space and resources, has produced an intensely complicated

¹³ Mosse's original reads 'the ethnographic question is not whether but *how* development projects work; not whether a project succeeds but how success is produced'

field site that I must attempt to make sense of without becoming overwhelmed by detail. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu I outline three distinctions relating to class that bring out the flavour of the spatialised hierarchies and social boundaries of the city. A description of these social and spatial divisions is crucial to the development of my later observations and arguments about the role of class boundaries and social and cultural capital in the activism scene

Chapter 3 addresses practical issues concerning research and the field. I introduce my informants and their organisations and position activist work in the city by outlining three interlinked social spaces, the local/‘grassroots’, the national/‘policy’, and the translocal/transnational. I also introduce a number of terms that will appear throughout the thesis. I go on to discuss the implications that the social organisation of the city had for my research and set out a field methodology. Finally I will reflect on access, positionality and the limitations of my study before providing a description of my data.

In chapter 4 I introduce narratives about corruption and the necessity of connection from a variety of sources, including public culture, collected during my time in Delhi. These will show how the blurred boundary between state and society is understood in different ways by my activist and non-activist informants; as a zone of opportunity that can be negotiated through connections, as a sign of the degeneration of the nation, as a means to explain unfortunate events, and as a way of reading power in the city and the nation. This chapter includes material from TV journalists working with issues of transparency, accountability and corruption in Delhi. It will also reveal the intersection of fictionalised narratives about activism and active citizenship from popular film, and repertoires of protest in the city during 2006-7.

Having set the scene in my previous chapters, from chapter 5 onwards I turn to ethnographic material that addresses the overarching theme of my thesis: How activists work through the existing social and political structures of the city in order achieve their aims.

In chapter 5 I introduce activist campaigns to implement legal mechanisms for transparency and accountability, in particular the Right to Information. I argue that activist attempts to discipline the everyday state and society, promote active citizenship and delineate the boundary between public and private roles are heavily dependant on factors such as social and cultural capital, mediation, negotiation and the application of expert knowledge about how government works in practice.

These themes follow through into chapter 6 in which I examine the role of class, space and gender in the practice of a Right to Information *sangathan* (grassroots organisation) in Delhi. Here upper middle class and slum dwelling activists work together to empower local residents to monitor the performance of government and claim their rights in relation to the local state. The organisation shows how Delhi's social boundaries may be crossed and that *sangathan* members can benefit from their engagement with activism. However, it also shows how the everyday practice of activism accommodates and reproduces, rather than breaks down, the social and spatial boundaries present in the city.

My discussion of class and gender continues into chapter 7 where I consider the role of rhetoric, representation, authenticity and performance in the transparency and accountability activism scene. Rhetorical narratives and performances are deployed in order to communicate across social boundaries within the activist scene, and beyond to potential donors. The performative aspects of transparency and accountability also emerge as activists attempt to resolve an intra-scene conflict and tension arises over the limits of what should remain private and what should be made public

In Chapter 8, my final ethnographic chapter, I address the practical issue of funding in the transparency and accountability activism scene. I argue that because of a focus on voluntarism, informality and personal commitment within the activist scene the organisation of livelihoods for full time activists leaves them dependent on patron-client networks and personal recommendations. Despite the fact that the transparency and accountability activism scene is concerned with promoting rationality and

discipline in the everyday state and society, within itself the ability of activists to make their way in the scene depends in part on their social and cultural capital, and ability to secure support.

So to begin, I will introduce Delhi.

Chapter 2. Entering the Field: The City and its Spaces, Boundaries and Distinctions.



(Graffiti response on a South Delhi village wall to the “I ♥ Delhi” campaign run by the Hindustan Times newspaper in January 2007 by the artist and environmental campaigner Ravi Aggarwal. Photograph by the Author)

‘Space is not a reflection of society, it is its expression’ (Castells, 1996: 410)

My aim in this chapter is to introduce and make sense of my field site, the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi. My attempts to ‘follow the metaphor’ (Marcus, 1998: 92-93) of transparency and accountability led me into a variety of different spaces in the city and into encounters, both real and virtual, with a wide cross-section of Delhi

society, as well as beyond the city following Delhi based informants to national and international meetings.

Delhi is a highly segregated and unequal city in which public spaces are often reserved for use by particular groups, easily identified by their appearance or use of language. Barriers to entry may be physical, often in the form of gates and guards. Social, in terms of what is considered to be appropriate behaviour according to class, caste or gender, and economic, as with the development of infrastructure for transport, entertainment and healthcare accessible only to members of particular social classes. Actors within my ethnography, including myself, are able to operate in or move between these spaces with different amounts of ease.

Considerations of space, and its administration, in the city are continuous themes in scholarly and popular literature about Delhi. Urban histories have traced the development of the built city through a succession of Imperial rulers, Hindu, Mughal, British and on into the post Independence (and Partition) period of inward migration, particularly from the Punjab (Spear 1945, Spear 1951; Gupta 1981; Frykenberg 1986; Datta 1986; Legg 2006, 2007). Anthropological explorations of Delhi have echoed this theme: Philip Oldenburg's (1976) classic ethnography focuses on the political organisation and administration of specific neighbourhoods of the city. Emma Tarlo focuses on the destruction of spaces, and the removal of the populations that inhabit them to areas that were once outside, but now are incorporated into the city (Tarlo 2003, Tarlo 2000a, Tarlo 2000b). Dupont, Tarlo and Vidal (2000) offer an edited volume that brings together authors who explore Delhi's streets and markets, its transport and architecture, and the spatial and political implications of migration to the city. Amita Baviskar (2003, 2007), Sanjay Srivastava (2007a, 2007b, chapter 5, 2009), Anne Waldrop (2004) and John Harriss (2005a, 2010) reveal the politics of class, space and governance in Delhi; and Srirupa Roy, in her exploration of the post-colonial politics of nationalism, offers a view of Delhi as a ritual space, the setting for the annual pageants of national renewal, Independence Day and Republic Day (2007, chapter 2)

Picking up these themes, in this chapter I show how the multiple sites in the city in which my fieldwork encounters took place are locations in distinct, albeit connected and overlapping, social worlds, formed around social classes. It is the relationships, social and physical boundaries, disjunctures and translation of meanings between these social worlds that structure the practice of transparency and accountability activism in Delhi.

Entering the Field.

I arrived in Delhi in May 2006 after spending 4 months undergoing language training in the Uttarakhand hill town of Mussoorie. The course at the language school had provided me with a grounding in Hindi, although its focus on polite speech had not quite prepared me for the everyday language of the street in Delhi. I planned to spend my first two months learning more and trying to get an ear for the city. I was keen to get to the city and begin work and left Mussoorie, a town famous for its elite schools and summer homes, on the weekend that many of the schools finished their winter holiday and those that could afford to headed in the exact opposite direction, leaving Delhi for the cooler hills.

For the first four months of my fieldwork I had agreed to look after the south Delhi apartment of some expatriate friends that had returned to the UK for the summer. At the beginning of June I moved into a fully furnished two bedroom flat in Gulmohar Park, an elite/upper middle class ‘colony’ in south Delhi. It came with a large balcony garden, complete with a *mali* (gardener), air-conditioning, a ‘broadband’ internet connection and Manoj, the ‘maid’ who came three days a week to clean the floors and do any domestic chores that I had not managed to do myself. The flat, and colony, came as something of a shock. I had not lived anywhere like it before in India or in the UK. However, despite my initial guilt at staying in such ‘posh’ and easy surroundings and some confusion about how to manage relationships with domestic workers, I soon realised that I was well located. Several of the groups that my pre-fieldwork research had identified as being of interest had offices in areas close by, and the leafy colony

provided a stark introduction to social relations, hierarchy and space in the city. I spent the greater part of my fieldwork living in this part of Delhi. When my partner joined me in the field in late 2006 we stayed for a month in Jangpura, a large colony further north and east in the city, but after that we settled back into south Delhi in a much more modest three room top floor flat in Uday Park, a small colony close to Gulmohar Park.

Lacking a car, and wanting to develop my knowledge of the city I looked for more affordable transport. I purchased a new single speed bicycle, and started to work out the bus routes that passed the colony, walking to the stop just outside the colony gates and often travelling the full distance of routes, marking them on my Eicher Street Map of Delhi. My choice of transport was a further introduction to class and space in the city. An *angrezi* (English/white) man riding a bus or a bicycle is an incongruous sight in Delhi. Both, especially the bicycle, are working class transport and my use of them does not fit with any expectations of the status of European expatriates. Where I was mostly ignored on the bus, travel on which seems to require a blank stoicism from the passengers, my use of the bike would often cause amazement and laughter. However, it offered me flexibility for travelling to nearby offices and field-sites, allowed me to explore my locality on my own terms, and avoided some of the waiting and negotiation that characterises using public transport in the city. If the effort of pedalling made me hotter then at least the passing air was cool. In local travel, at least during the day, a bicycle allows you to cut through the different spaces in the city, to pass through the wicket gates set in the steel barriers at the entrances to upper middle class colonies, to pass under and over the great arterial roads, vast rivers of traffic that section the city, and navigate a narrow *gali* (alleyway) in a medieval urban village. Playing the *flaneur* (de Certeau 1999) can be difficult in modern Delhi, but is made a little easier by bicycle.¹⁴ These explorations through the social and physical spaces of the city continued throughout my fieldwork and, almost as much as the encounters with the people that inhabit the city, they provide much of the background to the events described in this thesis.

¹⁴ For an entertaining account of a psychogeographical attempt to trace a spiral walking route from the centre of Delhi to its periphery see Sam Miller's 'Delhi: Adventures in a Mega-city' (2008).

The city itself is a major character in my narrative, structuring the politics of, and relationships between, my informants, a place of stunning inequality but also a zone of possibility where people can sometimes more freely explore new ways of being Indian. Many of my informants were migrants to the city, often living away from their families. Echoing Wirth's (1938) argument about cities as places in which cultures melt together and hybridise, while they might preserve their cultural distinctiveness by referencing their 'native place', many also found that life in the city allowed them freedom from the restrictions and gossip of small town or village life, and, in the case of some young middle class couples, the possibility to live together before marriage.

I now turn to the physical development of Delhi, its class distinctions, and how the spatialised hierarchies that structure social relationships, and thus the practice of transparency and accountability activism, have been built into the city.

Delhi as the Local. The Physical Development of Social Space in the City.

The National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi sprawls across an area of 1483 sq km on the Gangetic plain bounded by the states of Uttar Pradesh to the north and east and Haryana to the south and west, and bifurcated by the River Yamuna running north to south. The city had a population at the 2001 census of 13.8 million, but this has been growing steadily and is projected to rise to 19 million by 2010 (Kumar, 2006: 13 Govt.of Delhi, 2008a: 18). The lack of any major physical barriers to the process of urbanisation has historically favoured urban sprawl, a trend which continues today (Dupont, 2000: 230-231). The NCT is part of the National Capital Region (NCR) which includes districts of the surrounding states of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan. The Central NCR includes the new satellite commercial and residential hubs of Ghaziabad and NOIDA¹⁵ in Uttar Pradesh, and Gurgaon and Faridabad in Haryana. Although these new cities are administered by their respective states they are economically and socially integrated into Delhi.

¹⁵ NOIDA is an acronym, standing for New Okhla Industrial Development Authority, but it is said as a proper noun, pronounced as "Noyda".



(Map from (Government of India: Ministry of Urban Development 2007, 14)

The administration of the city is complicated. NCT Delhi is a state with its own legislative assembly and chief minister¹⁶, but certain areas and buildings are overseen directly by the central government, as is the Delhi Police force. At the local level the city is split into three municipal zones administered by different bodies. The New Delhi Municipal Committee (NDMC) is in charge of the central zone, which houses the parliament buildings and ministries, diplomatic quarters and housing for higher level central government servants and serving politicians. This area encompasses the British

¹⁶ At the time of my fieldwork the post was held by Sheila Dixit of the Congress party (see Govt. of Delhi 2008)

imperial capital of New Delhi, now commonly known as Lutyens Delhi after the more famous of its architects, and also includes some of the most expensive international hotels, and the central business and shopping district of Connaught Place. The Delhi Cantonment Board (DCB) oversees areas that house military administrative and residential areas in the central west zone of the city. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) is responsible for the remainder of the city, by far the largest and most densely populated part. This includes: the walled city of Shahjahanabad, also known as '*Purani Dilli*' (Old Delhi); the mixed areas of industry, slums, and lower and middle class housing to the east of the Yamuna; the steadily expanding urbanisation to the north and west of the city; and the upper middle class housing areas in the south of the city with their attendant slums.¹⁷

As Delhi has expanded outwards from its Mughal era core of Shahjahanabad it has steadily swallowed up farmland and outlying villages. The decision by the British colonial administration in the early 1900's to move the government to Delhi from Calcutta and construct a new capital, inaugurated in 1931, created the geometric order of New Delhi. The imperial city with its broad avenues and palatial bungalows built for the political and bureaucratic elite inscribed colonial notions of class and rank on the landscape, contrasting starkly to the congested lanes of the old city divided by caste and religion (Waldrop 2004, 96). It also created a large area of extremely low population density which has largely been maintained, leaving the 21st century metropolis with a hollow centre (Peck 2005, 258; Krishna Menon 2000, 147).

In 1938 the Delhi Improvement Trust (DIT) was formed (Legg 2006) and set about the implementation of a large number of schemes to address bad living conditions in the old city by planning and re-developing areas outside the walls according to a 'hierarchy of new – improved – spaces: the very poor, the poor and the middle classes were to be

¹⁷ For accounts of the development of Delhi to the east of the Yamuna see Emma Tarlo's excellent book '*Unsettling Memories: Narratives of India's Emergency*' and earlier work (Tarlo 2003, Tarlo 2000a, Tarlo 2000b) For the south of the city and its satellite towns see forthcoming work by Sanjay Srivastava listed in the bibliography as '*Citizens and Others: Urban Spaces, Consumerism and Middle class activism in Delhi* (unpublished Paper given to the Workshop on the Middle Classes at the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi on the 15th – 17th March 2007.

allotted their own spaces, each with its own characteristics' (Srivastava 2007a, 4). Post independence the DIT had to cope with the influx of refugees from Pakistan after the chaos of partition, as well as the already high levels of inward migration from other north Indian states. Between the census years of 1941-51 the population more than doubled to over 1.5 million (Datta 1986, 288; Singh 2000, 207; Dupont, Tarlo, and Vidal 2000, 229-230) and large new residential and commercial areas were urgently developed by the state to house the refugees (Krishna Menon 2000, 150; Datta 1986, 294-295). At the same time private developers such as the Delhi Land Finance company (DLF) had also begun 'colonising' areas outside the old city walls to meet the demand for housing from aspirational private individuals, sometimes on land bought from local landlords, but often under the auspices of the DIT.

In 1957 after an unfavourable report into its operation the DIT was replaced, by act of parliament, with the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). The DDA became the sole agency authorized to acquire, develop and dispose of land within the Delhi metropolitan area, with the exception of land belonging to established villages (Srivastava 2007a, 7) and had a mission to develop a master plan that might 'check the haphazard and sub-standard development in the metropolitan area' (Delhi Development Authority 2006, 5). Working with a team of American consultants from the Ford Foundation the DDA published a master plan in 1962 setting out details for land use in the city (Delhi Development Authority 2006). The plan provided for the type of industry allowed and its location, spaces for commerce and recreation, and precise measurements for residential floor areas, width of roads and heights of buildings. But this attempt to impose order on the growing city was soon overwhelmed by contingencies. The development of the planned city caused the simultaneous growth of an unplanned city to house the workers needed for construction projects.

As migrants flowed in from the northern states seeking work shanty towns grew in the marginal spaces left over from the master plan, along the sides of railway tracks and watercourses and on undeveloped land acquired by the DDA (Baviskar 2003, 91). First built as *kacca* (lit: raw) dwellings, from mud and thatch, as the slums became better

established many were redeveloped as *pucca* (lit: cooked) structures made from brick and tin, solidifying their physical and political existence as discrete entities in the city. In many cases the families of those that originally arrived as seasonal migrants have joined them and become permanent residents.

The Master Plan had to be revised again and again to respond to inward migration from neighbouring states and the unruly expansion of an increasingly wealthy city concerned more with economic practicality than planning. As the preface to a privately published edition of the master plan 2021 notes;

‘A large number of industries located themselves in other than planned area (sic) and mushroomed in residential areas[...]district centres and community centres etc. could not be developed resulting in commercialisation of major transport corridors and also in areas which suited the purpose due to their prestigious/strategic location [...] the urban villages were recommended to be conserved and retain their character but due to changed circumstances most of them attracted non-compatible uses and acted as a free market for land transactions...a large portion of the city remained un-served with regard to water supply, sewerage and drainage...absence of monitoring framework and lack of coordination in various departments [meant that] several plan provisions could not be implemented resulting [in] imbalances in use zones, activities and overall functioning of the city’ (Government of India: Ministry for Urban Development 2007, vii)

Today Delhi is a tapestry of planned and unplanned, authorised and unauthorised developments. The Delhi Government’s Economic Survey of Delhi 2008 calculates almost 40% of the population are living in slums or unauthorised colonies, and a further 12.7% in unauthorised colonies that have been ‘regularised’ (2008, 178). In case it should appear that it is only the working and lower middle classes that are occupying unauthorised spaces it is worth pointing out that these figures do not reflect the unauthorised developments, additions to private houses and changes of use from residential to commercial within planned and upmarket areas of the city. Added to this some of the most exclusive residential areas in the city are unauthorised, in particular

the grand ‘farmhouses’ built on the fringes of the city, with private electricity and water supplies, and occupied by Delhi’s economic and social elite (Miller 2008, 276-277).

Since the mid 1990’s a number of cases have been filed by middle class residents and residents associations with the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court, resulting in orders to the MCD to remove unauthorised constructions in specific parts of the city.



(March 2007. Owners rebuild their shop fronts in INA Market, south Delhi, after MCD demolition crews have literally cut the shops back to the limit authorised for them on the master plan. Picture: Hannah Matthew)

In late 2005 the High Court had widened the scope to cover all illegal constructions in the city; while concurrently the Supreme court passed an order relating to unauthorised commercial premises in residential areas (Sethi 2006b) beginning a process in which hundreds of shops, many in upmarket areas of the city, were ‘sealed’ awaiting demolition by MCD officials. Early victims of the demolition crews were illegally built

shopping malls in south Delhi housing upper middle class fashion designers whose troubles received little sympathy; but in other areas shop owners were more organised gaining political support from opposition parties and protesting en masse (Sethi 2006b).



(October 2006, traders in Lajpat Nagar Market South Delhi protesting against the sealing drives. Photo: Martin Webb)



(May 2006: The Mango outlet in the middle class shopping and residential district of South Extension 1. The three storey glass fronted shop was built on land zoned for residential use and as Diya Mehra, an anthropologist researching land use in Delhi, notes, it acts as a bell-weather for the progression of legal arguments over land use and unauthorised buildings (personal communication, December 4th, 2006). The shop was sealed and unsealed several times during my fieldwork during MCD drives against unauthorised buildings. Picture: Martin Webb)



(September 2006: But at least it did not suffer the fate of the MG1 Mall in south Delhi damaged beyond use but left standing by MCD demolition crews. Picture: Martin Webb)



(May 2006, the door of an unauthorised shop in South Extension 1 locked and sealed by the MCD. Photo: Martin Webb)

In response to public and political pressure the government passed the Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Act (Government of India, 2006) halting any demolitions for a year while negotiations about regularisation could take place. This was soon challenged by a further Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court on which Chief Justice Y.K. Sabharwal passed a judgement re-implementing the sealing drive, only to be publicly accused¹⁸ of acting on private interest as his sons, who ran a business developing shopping malls that might house relocated businesses, stood to gain from the order (Dubey 2007b). The sealing issue continues as a start-stop process, an intensely complicated field through which multiple players argue over space and resources and attempt to reorder the city. I am including it here not only because it was a major event in the city throughout my fieldwork, but also because it is these issues of

¹⁸ The accusation was published in Tehelka (Dubey 2007a), a news magazine with a reputation for focusing on anti-corruption issues and conducting high level sting operations.

space and the city, authorised and unauthorised spaces and legitimate and illegitimate citizens, around which local politics and activism are organised. The dichotomy between authorised and unauthorised developments has created fertile ground for unofficial transactions and political mediation that might secure the continued existence of unauthorised structures. It has also provided an enduring topic around which Delhi's residents can share talk about corruption, accountability and legitimacy, construct an idea of how power functions in the city, and position themselves within it socially and politically¹⁹.

For the middle class residents of the older garden 'colonies' the rapid expansion of the city prompted a retreat into exclusivity. Suburbs that had originally been developed 'not for mere living but to make living pleasant'²⁰ (Srivastava 2007a, 28) for a new type of 'citizen-consumer' (2007a, 6), had become increasingly hemmed in. From the 1990's onwards a progressive privatisation of middle class colony spaces has been taking place, concurrent with the growth of Residents Welfare Associations²¹ (RWAs). Organised RWA activism has coalesced around issues such as the provision and cost of utilities, particularly the essential binary of *Bijli/Panni* (electricity and water), and the presence of unauthorised slums and commercial activity. Representative politics is also a contentious area with many middle class colony dwellers perceiving themselves to be the legitimate citizens of Delhi, on the basis that they pay property and income tax, whose rights are undermined by "vote bank" politics, in which illegal slum dwellers are protected by local politicians and secure unofficial rights to land and services through weight of numbers at the ballot box (Dupont, Tarlo, and Vidal 2000, 20; Tarlo 2003, 12). As one representative of a colony RWA said at a meeting of RWA representatives,

¹⁹ This issue is not a new one. A 40 year old study by Bose (1969) into land speculation in Delhi looks in detail at the spread of the city, the building of unauthorised colonies, and the relationships between local representatives, speculators and buyers keen to get cheap land in the city. People buy in the hope that a combination of bureaucratic connections, political support, and documentation produced through the payment of land taxes, will ultimately lead to the land being regularised.

²⁰ The caption for a 1950's poster advertising DLFs planned developments in Delhi (Srivastava 2007a, 28).

²¹ Recent work by Sanjay Srivastava (2007a, 2009) and Amita Baviskar (2007) delves into the world of middle class activism and environmentalism in Delhi linking the recent history of the built environment to contemporary middle class campaigns to 'clean up' the city.

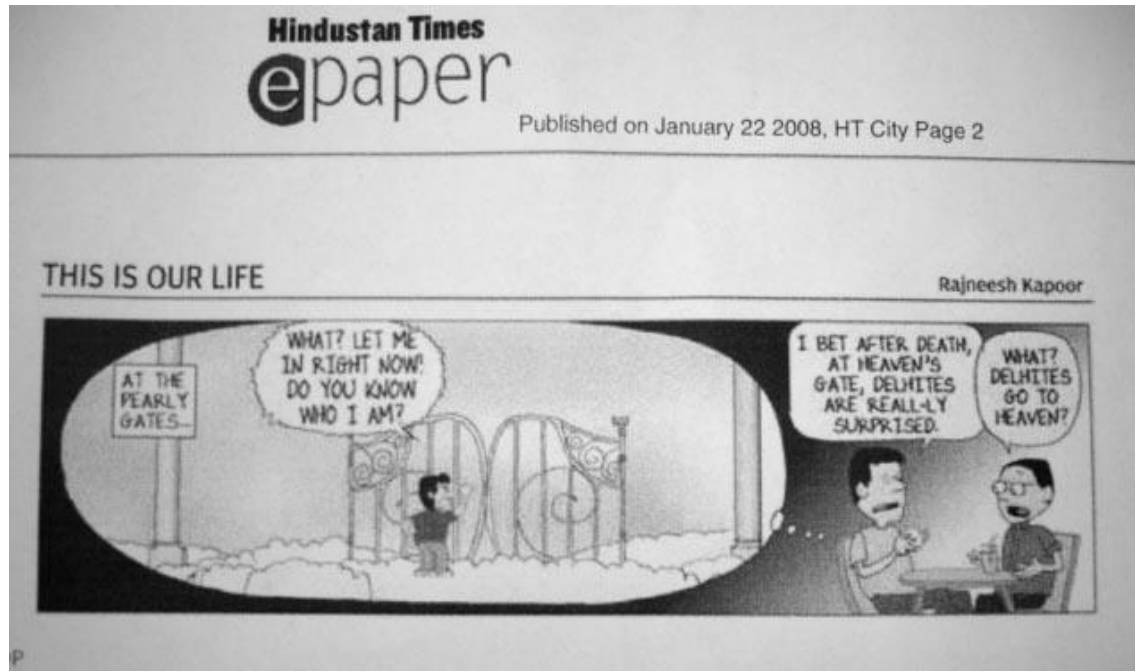
bemoaning his unsuccessful campaign as a “clean candidate” in the Delhi municipal elections;

‘Politics is a dirty game for dirty people...these *jhuggis* (slums) should be removed. Then only Delhi’s *kalyan* (welfare) will happen, and then only residents’ *kalyan* will happen too. [Our] RWA is an organization for well educated people, and clean people.’ (Field notes from a United Residents Joint Action (URJA) meeting in Delhi, April 14th 2007)

The state has encouraged some of these middle class associations. For example, the Delhi Government’s ‘*Bhagidari*’ (partnership) programme has brought together ‘stakeholders’ such as RWAs, Market Traders Associations (MTAs), industrial groups and NGOs with the government to promote active citizenship, participation and better governance (Shiva Kumar and Government of NCT of Delhi 2006, 87; Srivastava 2007a, 20-21, Srivastava 2009, 343-345). But although this has been a significant development it is an initiative focused more at residents of planned areas of the city and does not, as yet, include the populations of the city’s slums (Harriss 2005a, 1043; Chakrabarti 2008, 99). The poor in the city are forced to seek other routes to solve their problems, often acting collectively, but less formally, gathering to petition political or other local representatives and engage in demonstrations (Harriss 2005a, 1044).

The conflation of the language of citizenship, education and cleanliness in the RWA candidate’s complaint is telling. As the following sections will outline the spatial politics of the city are bound up with the enduring inequalities of Indian society as well as with the effects of post-liberalisation social and political change. To develop this account of the social and physical spaces in the city, I will now explore the issue of social class, and its connection to other forms of inequality such as caste, and provide some ethnographic detail concerning different spaces in the city.

Classes and Spaces.



(Rajneesh Kapoor's cartoon series *This is Our Life*, taking a wry look at modern middle class Delhi. Hindustan Times e-paper January 22nd 2008)

My aim in this section is to provide some ethnographic detail to illuminate the distinctions between social spaces in the city and relate these to broader discussions of class and social inequality. My intention is to provide a guide to understanding the lives and social spaces that I will introduce during the thesis. To set the theoretical background to my analysis I will draw on the work of scholars focused on class in India who have used Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital to explore the reproduction of inequality and the development of the middle class in India. The character, history and politics of the middle class, its role in legitimising discourses about nation building and civil society, and its place in the contemporary Indian national imagination are important to my discussion of transparency and accountability activism in Delhi. With this in mind I will start with a discussion of the middle class through which I will begin to address the themes set out in my research questions (see Chapter 1). Questions that require an exploration of the everyday 'economy of

practices' (Bourdieu 1984, 97) that structure transparency and accountability activism in Delhi.

Framing the Middle Class

In recent years the perceived rise of the 'New Middle Class' (Fernandes 2006; Fernandes and Heller 2006; Fuller and Narasimhan 2007) in India has become a significant marker around which aspiration, identity and critiques of the development of the nation have coalesced (Mazzarella 2005). The speed at which the Indian economy has been expanding, and the potential market for goods that a broad based consuming class might offer, has caused considerable excitement in the media and amongst marketing analysts (Mazzarella 2003, 272; Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2009, 2; Favero 2005, 18). As a post-liberalisation cultural phenomenon the rise of a new middle class appears to promise a new model of national development, and a normative political project, that helps to shape the terms of India's national and international identity (Fernandes 2006, xxvii).

But, in order to understand the position, composition and boundaries of the new middle class, and to qualify some of the hubris attached to its rise, we must consider the mechanisms that have led to the formation of this group. As Fernandes (2006, xxx) argues, the new middle class is the outcome of a series of dynamic processes of symbolic and material production. These have their roots in historical processes and the development of classificatory practices (Bourdieu 1984) through which individuals and groups attempt to preserve social standing and negotiate upward mobility. Tracing these historical roots back into the colonial period allows us to develop a view of the ways in which markers of inequality such as caste identities, educational credentials, occupation, and cultural and spatial politics are imbricated in the reproduction of class in India.

The development of British colonial education policy was instrumental in the creation of the colonial middle class. It was hoped that English medium education would, in the words of the colonial administrator Thomas Macaulay, create a 'class, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and

intellect', to aid in colonial administration (Fernandes 2006, 3). However, the middle class that emerged from this process was more complicated than Macaulay's vision would suggest²².

The differing ability of members of this new class to consolidate their position within the political economy of colonial rule did not produce a homogenous social group. Instead it produced a layered class that reworked existing caste based inequalities (2006, 8; Beteille 2007, 293). The limits that colonial rule put on economic opportunities for the emerging middle class meant that many members belonged to literary, professional and service occupations distinguished by their English medium education. But English language skills alone were not always enough to secure higher level positions in the colonial bureaucracy. Applicants also had to be from 'respectable' families with backgrounds in professions such as law, medicine, teaching or government service, those areas already dominated by the Hindu upper castes. Thus religious and caste differences filtered through the medium of educational credentials delineated the boundaries of the upper levels of the colonial middle class (Fernandes 2006, 7-8; Fernandes and Heller 2006, 514).

As a result the middle class in colonial India could not be classified as a social group 'occupying a median position in terms of standard sociological indicators of income, consumption or status' (Joshi 2010b, xviii). While they were not necessarily from the traditional landowning classes claimants to 'middle class' membership in the colonial era were characterised by high caste, religious or bureaucratic status, and were in possession of sufficient economic resources and educational training to act as 'cultural entrepreneurs' (Joshi 2001, 7-8). This cultural entrepreneurship involved the articulation of new sets of beliefs and values linked to education, respectability and the development of an Indian public sphere, which allowed members of the middle class to represent themselves on the national stage and emerge as aspirants to political power under the British (Joshi 2010b, xix-

²² Markovits (2010) highlights the existence of mercantile and entrepreneurial segments of the middle class in colonial India, existing beyond the world of the Maculayist English educated urban professionals.

xx; Chatterjee 1999, 35-36). In this respect the role of educated upper caste middle class professionals in leading the nationalist movement (Beteille 1991, 6; Jaffrelot 2003, 48-49), and in developing associational life and intermediate institutions directed at nation building (Watt 2005, 175) made the middle class a key site in the formation of a hegemonic nationalist ideology (Fernandes and Heller 2006, 514; Chatterjee 1999, 36; Deshpande 2003, 144).

Post independence, with the introduction of a developmental state and its associated ideology of patriotic nationalist production, and need for trained professionals to oversee the scientific-technical process, the middle classes took on a further moral legitimacy as those managing the development project for the nation (Deshpande 2003, 144). The political dominance of the Congress Party in these early decades was predicated on this hegemonic politics of nation building which linked the rule of an upper caste and Anglophone 'national elite' to the support of lower caste groups through patron-client relations (Sheth 1999, 2506; Corbridge and Harriss 2003, 58). The expansion of higher education institutions and the focus on scientific and technical training to supply the developmental state with the necessary expertise led to further growth of a middle class less dependent on the ownership of land, and more on the development of social and cultural capital and educational credentials (Deshpande 2003, 145; Beteille 1991, 16-17). Lower caste groups lacking the capital to invest in education did not benefit greatly from this expansion, although policies of reservation of educational and occupational places for lower castes groups, implemented after the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, did allow some sections to begin to enter modern education and the bureaucracy (Sheth 1999, 2508; Corbridge and Harriss 2003, 128). For Sheth the politics of caste groupings that has emerged from the policy of reservations represents a 'classisation' of caste in which individual members of castes have been released from the occupational and ritual constraints of caste identity, and have linked their interests and identities to 'organisations and categories relevant to the urban-industrial system and modern politics'. In doing so they further involve themselves

in emerging forms of social stratification based on class and educational credentials (1999, 2508).

As Beteille points out this interest in gaining professional qualifications which enable access to particular occupations produces a middle class discourse which privileges the family and education. Writing in 1991, on the cusp of economic liberalisation, for Beteille it is these institutions rather than historical caste hierarchies which are of most interest to the contemporary urban middle class. Although caste remains 'manifestly correlated' (1991, 20) with the reproduction of inequality, educational credentials and the family unit emerge as the significant factors in developing the social and cultural capital through which the middle class reproduces itself (1991, 19). Research carried out in rural Uttar Pradesh by Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery shows something of this process in action, but also notes how enduring caste and class inequalities are reproduced in these emerging forms of stratification. As their work shows, even as access to education enables some Dalits to raise their social standing, the social and cultural capital deployed by the higher caste rural elite ensures that their sons gain privileged access to educational opportunities and government jobs (Jeffrey, Jeffery, and Jeffery 2005).

The reduction in the role of the state and the development of a mixed economy in the era of liberalisation has seen greater numbers of people identifying themselves as middle class, although the actual numbers remain the subject of debate and competing definitions (Deshpande 2003, 134). Current estimates of the middle classes in India cover a huge range; from around 50 million (5%), 'a shallow crust' as the sociologist Dipankar Gupta puts it (personal communication, June 2nd 2006), to around 300 million (30%) out of a billion (Mawdsley 2004, 84). In either case the middle class comprises a relatively small proportion of the total population. For my purposes assessments that favour reported income and the analysis of statistics provided by government bodies such as the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) and the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) (Sridharan 2004, 410-421), while useful, do not adequately capture the class experiences and positions expressed by my

informants. Ethnographically a focus on the middle class as a *class in practice*, that is a class defined by its politics and the everyday practices through which it reproduces its privileged position (Fernandes and Heller 2006, 495) wedded to an appreciation of the meaning attached to social space in Delhi proves more fruitful.

Following Fernandes (2006) and Fernandes and Heller (2006), thinking of the middle class as a class in practice allows us to focus on the continuities between earlier formations of, and discourses about, the middle class and rise of the 'new middle class' and its central role in India's reorganised economy. Here then Deshpande's alternative theoretical 'definitions of the middle class that may be good to think with' (2003, 139) prove useful. Deshpande argues that the middle class is the class that articulates the hegemony of the ruling bloc. That is that the middle class provides a connection for relations between industrial-financial capital and agrarian capital in the ruling bloc, and helps to produce and maintain the discourse of legitimisation of the ruling bloc through its practices. Post-liberalisation the middle class retains this intermediary role. However, where previously middle class identity was bound up with the maintenance of the developmental state, more recently it is consumption of the commodities made available through liberalisation that has been recast as positive for the wealth of the nation as a whole (Rajagopal 2001, 34). This valorisation of consumption practices, allied to new forms of media technology and advertising, plays a significant role in the shaping of middle class identity (Fernandes and Heller 2006, 503-504; Fernandes 2006; Mazzarella 2003).

Next, echoing what I have set out above, Deshpande argues that the middle class is the class most dependant on cultural capital, and on the mechanisms that reproduce it; For Deshpande 'such cultural capital may consist of identities (caste, community or region) and competences (educational credentials, linguistic and other social skills) (2003, 140). As Fernandes and Heller argue the new middle class represents an alliance between 'commercial and professional interests eager to exploit new market opportunities, and socially conservative elements protecting a range of

status privileges' (2006, 504). The need to protect status privileges has contributed to the intersection of a middle class politics concerning civic space and citizenship and Hindu nationalist political formations.

This intersection is organised by the power relationships set out in Deshpande's third definition. He argues that the middle class is an increasingly differentiated class which;

'specialises in the production and dissemination of ideologies; its elite fraction specialises in the production of ideologies and its mass fraction engages in the exemplary consumption of these ideologies, thus investing them with social legitimacy'.

For Deshpande the elite fraction is the intelligentsia, with an emphasis on professional politicians, top bureaucrats, media people and intellectuals (to which list I would add leading social activists). Fernandes and Heller further note that the dominant fraction are those with 'advanced professional credentials or accumulated cultural capital who occupy positions of recognised authority' (2006, 500). The role of this segment is to produce and transmit ideologies and the practices necessary to sustain them. For Deshpande the 'mass' fraction of the middle class lends weight to these ideologies through practice, thus allowing them to take root and 'stick' (2003, 142). Fernandes and Heller break down the mass fraction of the middle class further into middle category, including small business owners, merchants and rich farmers who aspire to 'dominant fraction status', and a subordinate middle class fraction of salaried workers who do not have significant authority over other workers. This would include public and private sector clerical workers and low authority professions such as teachers and nurses (2006, 500)

For Fernandes and Heller the politics developed by this relationship of the production and consumption of ideology within the new middle class have taken an 'illiberal turn'. On the one hand towards the cultural politics of Hindutva which has provided a 'unifying political frame' that does not disrupt new middle class interests in the benefits of liberalisation or the reproduction of hierarchies such as

caste and language (2006, 507). On the other hand to a neo-liberal anti-politics which naturalises the market (2006, 509), to a civic sense which sees lower class and caste 'political society' as dirty and corrupt (2006, 510), to the privatisation of education and valorisation of new professional occupations such as IT, marketing and financial services over government occupations accessible to the lower classes and castes via the public education system (2006, 514; Fuller and Narasimhan 2007), and to local conflicts over civic beautification, urban space and citizenship (Fernandes and Heller 2006, 516; Fernandes 2006; Srivastava 2007a; Baviskar 2007).

My thesis intersects with and contributes to these debates by offering an insight into the lives of transparency and accountability activists, the majority of whom are from the middle classes, but many of whom actively position themselves *against* this illiberal political turn. They work to enrol slumdweller as active citizens with rights in the city (see chapters 5 and 6) and utilise inclusive discourses concerning the nation, development, citizenship, and the possibility that the state can deliver the welfare it promises if it is disciplined with the aid of an active and informed citizenry. However, even as they do so they work through, and reproduce many of the structural inequalities and enduring differences of caste and class that I have outlined above. The activist networks that they are involved in are woven into the cultural politics and economy of practices of Delhi's middle classes, and valorise many of the fundamental structures of social, cultural and economic capital that reproduce difference in the city. Particularly in the case of groups who style themselves as working at the 'grassroots' (see chapter 6), there is a significant slippage between the discourse and rhetoric of grassroots activism and the way that the practice of activist groups in Delhi intersects with the economy of middle class practices in the city. To explore this intersection further I will introduce a revealing element of the practice of the activist groups that I encountered; that is, the elision of discussions of caste from the discourse of activists who are otherwise centrally concerned with addressing inequality.

Not Mentioning the 'Undoables': Merit, Equality and why Transparency and Accountability Activists in Delhi don't talk about Caste.

In late august 2007, nearing the end of my fieldwork, I attended an activist conference in Uttar Pradesh. While there I took the chance to interview an NGO leader who works in the field of 'dalit empowerment'. He was connected to activist networks that I had encountered in Delhi through participating in the organisation of national campaigns for transparency and accountability. During the interview he asked me about my work and I told him how the reproduction of class differences within activism was becoming a significant theme in my research. He quickly reinterpreted what I had told him about class in the activist scene through the lens of caste politics, noting that many of the significant people in my field, in particular senior leading figures, had Brahmin or upper caste names (fieldnotes, August 22nd 2007). In his work in rural and peri-urban Uttar Pradesh it was clear that a consciousness of the language and politics of caste played a significant role in the everyday practice of his activism. In contrast this seemed to be much less the case for my informants in Delhi. They do not talk about caste a great deal, and did not seem to reference it in the way that they would class when discussing their work or power relationships within activist networks.

I would argue that this elision of caste happens for two reasons. First, it emerges as part of the everyday practice of activism in Delhi as activists attempt to perform a type of 'prefigurative' politics (Maeckelbergh 2009, 2011). That is, to paraphrase an aphorism usually attributed to M.K. Gandhi, they attempt to 'be the change that they wish to see in the world'. As I show in Chapter 6, activist groups organise their meeting spaces and offices in order to try to reduce differences between people. Attempts are made to eliminate the most obvious hierarchies by all participants sitting on the floor, and referring to each other by first names only, usually with the honorific *ji* added, which has the effect of removing a significant caste identifier. As one informant who works for a national transparency campaign group, and whose family name would identify her as a Brahman, told me; when she goes to make a presentation to a local activist *sangathan* (grassroots group) meeting about the

Right to Information Act she is only ever introduced by her first name and organisational affiliation. She went on to say that subjects such as caste are ‘the undoables’ and added that activists do not refer to them in their professional lives because ascribed differences such as caste, religious community or gender are not supposed to be politically significant as markers of people’s ability to participate in activist work or speak at meetings (personal communication, 13th April 2011). Of course this does not mean that the spaces in which activists do their work are not shot through with visible hierarchies and the language and practise of class, gender and caste inequalities. My thesis demonstrates clearly that they are, and that transparency and accountability activism in Delhi actually works *through* these inequalities. But, consciously attempting to create spaces in which participatory politics can be performed, and in which ascribed identities are not deployed to exclude or silence others, is an important part of activist ideology and practice.

As a result conflicts over power relationships and inequalities within activist groups are couched in the language of class and cultural capital rather than caste. For example, during the period of my fieldwork one grassroots activist group split because of a decision by the group leader to spend funds, awarded to him on behalf of the group, on setting up an NGO employing middle class, Anglophone, law graduates to work on activist cases. The relatively inexperienced graduates were to be paid salaries three to four times those of the very experienced grassroots workers. Three prominent members of the group left in protest at this channelling of funds to middle class professionals. Possible caste differences between the grassroots workers and the lawyers were not raised as an issue, but class inequalities and their recognition through higher levels of pay played a central role in the argument. For the activists the higher wages offered in recognition of educational credentials were a sign that their grassroots experience and intimate local knowledge of the ‘ground realities’ were not valued highly enough.

Second, this politics of prefiguration and participation intersects with a middle class ambivalence and embarrassment about the persistence of caste and caste based

politics in contemporary India (Deshpande 2003, 108; Beteille 2005, 161), and a discourse of secular-modern consumer led citizenship. This discourse recasts the middle class subject as the new ‘common man’, the victim of what Thomas Hansen (2000, 35) would call the profane sphere of political corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency (Fernandes 2006, 184).

In one version of this discourse often employed by middle class civil society groups involved in the spatial politics of the city, such as Residents Welfare Associations, the urban poor, the political elite, and the state bureaucracy, particularly at the lower levels, are constructed as players in a nexus of corruption. The political elite retain power through the patronage of the poor and ‘vote bank politics’. The bureaucrats will not work without being bribed. The urban poor are undeserving and poverty stricken because of a lack of educational merit or work ethic, and are also a threat to the civic order and cleanliness of the city (Fernandes 2006, 185-186). They do not pay for their water or electricity, and do not contribute property taxes, and thus are not proper citizens. In this discourse the old system of political representation has failed and the new middle class consumer-citizen acting within the sphere of civil society, and making new links with local government through schemes to reorder urban space, offers a vision of the path to success (Srivastava 2009, 343; Harriss 2007, Harriss 2005b).

The statement about ‘dirty politics’ from the RWA activist quoted earlier in this chapter²³ is exemplary of this discourse. A discourse that is used to justify some of the *exclusionary* spatial practices of the middle and upper middle classes in the city such as the gating of middle class spaces, of which more in the following sections. For Fernandes (2004) these exclusionary practices play a part in a middle class ‘politics of forgetting’ in which the classes marginalised by India’s liberalisation, those who do not fit into the new liberalised vision for the nation, are made invisible within the dominant national political culture. This construction of the

²³ Also see Harriss (2005b) for further examples of this kind of statement.

middle class subject as the modern citizen inevitably links citizenship to upper caste status (Deshpande 2003, 146). As Fernandes and Heller observe;

‘even as liberalisation unleashes the discourse of merit, ability, achievement, and mobility and the world is said to become flatter, the fractions of the NMC²⁴ deploy their positional assets with ever greater assiduousness and the logic of class struggle relentlessly delivers inequality. Contrary to the commonsense middle class wisdom that caste matters less in urban areas, careful analysis of the latest round of the NSSO data found that caste inequalities are more pronounced in urban than in rural areas.’ (2006, 513)

When class status is represented as merit, ability and achievement, the necessity to speak of caste as a significant in terms of inequality is suppressed, as it does not fit comfortably within the discourse of modern citizenship.

Another version of this discourse is used by activist groups working with the poor in the city and contains many of the same elements. There is still the valorisation of action within civil society; there is still the concern about the local state, accounting for public money, and the corruption of politics. But this discourse differs in that it is *inclusionary*. The activist groups in this section of the civil society scene are working to enrol the poor in the city into civil society, not just as citizens, but as active citizens who make their own claims vis a vis the Indian state (See chapter 6). In both exclusionary and inclusionary versions of the discourse the secular-modern citizen is the central subject. In this respect the idea of merit runs through both. In the exclusionary discourse, with its politics of forgetting, merit is used to argue that those who don’t achieve are themselves to blame. In the inclusionary version of the discourse the idea of merit is linked to the potential for change for the poor of participation, equality and assertion of rights as modern citizens towards whom the state has duties. Perhaps we might call this a politics of remembering. In either version of the discourse the public discussion of caste is a faux pas as it refers back to tradition on the one hand, and ‘political society’ (Chatterjee 2001, 172) on the

²⁴ New Middle Class

other. Thus in groups working with the inclusionary version of the discourse discussion of caste is also suppressed.

In either case these different versions of the discourse emerge from the middle classes themselves, and are inherently related to the ‘middleness’ of the middle class and its role in producing and legitimising moral discourses about the nation (Deshpande 2003, 131; Chatterjee 1999, 36-37). The many points of agreement between the different versions of this discourse of secular modern citizenship also allows groups that might otherwise seem antagonistic, an upper middle class RWA and a grassroots group working in a nearby slum for example, to participate in wider campaigns for transparency and accountability such as the Drive Against Bribes Campaign covered in Chapter 5. This explains the propensity for transparency and accountability campaigns at the local and national level to encompass groups that would otherwise be strange political bedfellows.

So to sum up, caste is always present as it is intrinsically linked to the historical reproduction of class inequality, however, the public discussion of caste is suppressed in the professional and moral discourses about the nation and corruption used by transparency and accountability activist groups in Delhi. As we shall see during the thesis, the language and practice of caste distinction do appear in various encounters and emerge in some life histories, but in their working lives activists do not generally make reference to it. I will now take this discussion of caste and class on into three ethnographic sections that explore some of the spaces in the city in which my informants live and work.

Three Urban Spaces

When Baviskar (2003) refers to Delhi in her essay on slum demolitions and the spatial development of the city she makes distinctions between the ‘working class’, those that work in the service sector and live in the unplanned areas of the city vulnerable to eviction and demolition, and the ‘upper class’ and ‘bourgeoisie’;

‘the group that is instantly recognisable in Delhi by dress, deportment, and language: the *padhe-likhe*²⁵ (educated) and the propertied, white collar professionals and those engaged in business: the owners of material and symbolic capital’ (2003, 97).

In this section I would prefer to follow Bourdieu in trying to ‘twist the stick in the other direction’ (1985, 723) away from the language of Marxian analysis, of classes in and for themselves. As Bourdieu notes, social worlds, here both the city and the transparency and accountability activism scene that exists within it, are;

‘constructed on the basis of principles of differentiation or distribution constituted by the set of properties active within the social universe in question, i.e., capable of conferring strength, power within that universe, on their holder. Agents and groups of agents are thus defined by their relative positions within that space.’ (Bourdieu 1985, 724)

Within the ‘field of forces’, the power relations that affect those operating in the social world, it is social and cultural, as well as economic, capital that determines positions and possibilities for different actors (1985, 724). Thinking about the activist scene and the city in these terms allows me to acknowledge social hierarchies and inequalities between my activist informants, but also to consider the way that some activist groups must work across social boundaries and include people from different backgrounds if they are to be effective in their own terms.

²⁵ *Padhe-likhe* (Hindi) literally meaning reading-writing and relating to the term *padhe-likhe log* meaning people who can read and write.

Following from this, and from Mawdsley's suggestion that class analysis must be locally anchored to make sense (2004, 87). I will now move on to a description of different spaces in the city. These are not intended to be exhaustive; However, focusing on the intersection of class relationships and geographical space (Bourdieu 1985, 725-726) will allow me to demonstrate how the relationships between my informants are structured by their locations in the city and their 'practical historical experiences of living in the world' (Gledhill 1994, 138). Where possible throughout the thesis I would rather allow my informants to use their own terms to define themselves in relation to class and caste. Where they do not, or in situations where social difference is rhetorically elided to present a picture of classless and casteless unity and participation, as in the use of the terms 'grassroots' or 'citizens' I feel I must offer a broad explanatory framework to show the ways in which different informants are located socially and spatially in the city.

The Colonies of the Elite and Upper Middle Class.

What C. Wright Mills referred to as 'the power elite' (1959), those people whose decision making, or lack of it, can directly affect large numbers of lives (1959, 3-4), are easy to spot as they move through the city. A government car with a siren and military escort, a corporate chief executive's limousine, or the electrifying appearance of a red Ferrari on Delhi's dusty streets all starkly signify transcendent power, wealth and connections. But beyond these obvious manifestations the elite becomes less visible as it blends with the upper middle classes, and as with the middle classes in general, popular understandings of the term cannot easily be transformed into hard definitions (Bourgouin 2007, 6-7; Marcus 1983, 7). To sketch an outline for Delhi; the elite and upper middle class would include people, and their families, working in, or retired from, the upper levels of the formal economy. They might be senior bureaucrats, politicians, high ranking military and police officers, corporate, media and IT executives of the 'New Rich' (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007), development professionals and academics, or from within the medical and legal professions. They may be members of Delhi's elite sporting and social clubs such as the Gymkhana, and in some cases they will be in a position to take advantage of a 'revolving door' between

government posts, development organisations and corporations (Bhushan 2004). In almost all cases, perhaps with the exception of some politicians, they will speak English, possibly as a first language. They will have been educated through the English medium at an elite school and university, and may well have studied to postgraduate level at a respected university in the US or UK. Within this group we would find a higher concentration of 'old money'. Elites in de Pina-Cabral's sense who 'control specific resources by means of which they acquire political power and material advantage' (2000, 2) royal families, political dynasties and the descendants of the colonial middle class from which the Indian National Congress and its project to negotiate independence and constitute the modern Indian nation developed (Favero 2005, 122; Beteille 1991, 6; Jaffrelot 2003, 48-49). These are the dominant fraction that Deshpande (2003) and Fernandes and Heller (2006, 500) identify.

Older elite and upper middle class informants I encountered were often given to remembering New Delhi as a quieter and more cultured place inhabited by a political and bureaucratic elite, before the advent of a brash new entrepreneurial spirit. They told me how the city was not as they remembered it growing up and talked nostalgically of a much smaller city in which the children of the elite all knew each other, from visiting the same club or going to the Kwality restaurant or Gaylords in Connaught Place. Now they rarely came to the centre of the city. Asserting a conscious class distinction (Bourdieu 1984), 'Modern Delhi' they said was too full of new money, less 'people like us' and more 'people like them' (field notes May 30th 2007).

The elite and upper middle class will have access to satellite television, the latest fashions in telecommunications, and can afford high speed home access to the internet. That the vast majority will be from upper caste backgrounds is a fact, although caste is often downplayed and some have withdrawn commitment to it as an identity (Beteille 1992, 14). Within this category, living parallel lives and using many of the same spaces in the city, we can also include expatriates working for foreign governments, corporations, development organisations and international media groups based in Delhi.

The internationally mobile upper middle classes and elite are, to some extent, a trans-national and deterritorialised class, but use spaces within the city that are 'reterritorialised' (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 20) by class. Adding to older spaces such as Delhi's exclusive sporting and social clubs, the post liberalisation boom has seen a layer of "international" standard, and climate controlled, infrastructure being developed in the city, complete with power back up and guards on the doors, to provide for their shopping, entertainment and medical needs (Baviskar 2003, 92), new spaces for elite citizen consumers that exclude those who lack the economic power to consume.

The satellite towns that have come up around Delhi, with their concentration on new technology industries and modern housing, have intensified this process. Increasing numbers of the elite and upper middle classes have moved out of the city proper into these new developments, often high rise and with a guaranteed 24 hour electricity and water supply. This shift has also prompted the development of middle class transport infrastructure, expressways and flyovers, to support the private car and "call centre taxis" commuting between the city and its satellites, as well as the extension of the new metro rail system.

The exclusiveness of the residential spaces that the elite and upper middle class occupies has been partly built into the city through the master plans, but is also an ongoing process. Grace and favour housing attached to political and bureaucratic appointments and located in the Lutyens designed zone of the city, as well as government housing located in the central NDMC administered area automatically denote high status, while in the upper middle class and elite 'colonies' of the MCD zone class boundaries have more recently been solidified through the political activism of Residents Welfare Associations and the gating of colonies.



(July 2007, Security guards man a gate in an upper middle class colony in south Delhi. Photo Hannah Matthew)

Inside the gates of the upper middle class colonies serenity reigns, apart from the occasional noise of building works as the booming property market prompts the demolition of comparatively modest 1970's built houses and the construction of more ostentatious blocks with improved air-conditioning and apartments to rent. The battering noise of the city beyond the gates is reduced to a background roar allowing the daily sounds of the colony to show through. Birdsong from the shading gulmohar trees, shouts of *kabaaareee!* as *Kabari-walle* (scrap merchants) cycle around the lanes hoping to buy waste newspaper, glass and metal for resale, fruits and vegetable sellers calling out as they pushed their wares on a *thela* (handcart), or the clatter of the milkman delivering fresh milk from churns strapped either side of a battered Bajaj scooter.



(A security guard mans a guardhouse in an upper middle class colony in south Delhi. Photo Hannah Matthew)

Walking the colony's avenues are domestic workers buying provisions, delivering pressed clothes, collecting rubbish, cleaning cars, walking pedigree dogs and guarding the gates of houses. The residents might be seen driving or being driven in air conditioned cars, or walking down to the colony club or park for some recreation. The colony is organised as a series of private spaces resting within each other. The private house with gates, and perhaps guards, nested within the colony block, and the block nested in turn within the colony as a whole. Even though it is technically public, administered by the municipality, in relation to the city beyond its boundary the colony has the feel of a private, and for private also read safe, space, a sense which the residents take with them as they leave the colony in air-conditioned cars. However, the irony of the colonies is that the carefully maintained boundaries have to be porous. Domestic labour from the unruly city beyond the gates must be allowed inside in order to sustain the upper middle class lifestyle.



(Domestic servants exercising pedigree dogs in an upper middle class colony in south Delhi, July 2007. Photo Hannah Matthew)

Anne Waldrop argues that upper middle class colonies have become increasingly fortified in an attempt to create and maintain order against what the residents perceive as the increasing chaos and breakdown of social norms taking place in the city (2004, 97). The erection of steel gates across colony entrances by RWAs is part of a process of spatial segregation justified through discourses about cleanliness, a fear of crime (2004, 99), civic beautification and civil society participation, that echoes processes taking place in other cities around the world (Low 2003, 387-8). However, for Waldrop the Indian case differs from other examples of fortification because of the relationships between colony dwellers and the people that must work inside the colonies as servants, labourers and hawkers. While access by ‘servant looking’ people (2004, 99) to the colonies is prevented or at least controlled by fortification, individually workers are required to enter colony houses to perform intimate tasks such as cooking and cleaning and care for the elderly. Also, the construction boom within the upper middle class and elite colonies, and the practice of labourers and their families occupying buildings during contracts means that there are always working people present within the

colonies. To explain this paradoxical situation Waldrop follows Froystad's assertion that although upper middle class people prefer not to refer to caste when talking about inequality, observing the 'master-servant' relationship reveals the way that caste is relevant in interactions between the middle and working classes, and that these interactions then serve to reproduce notions of caste (Froystad 2005, 74; Waldrop 2004, 99). For Waldrop the gating of Delhi's upper middle class colonies is an attempt to create a space in which a caste hierarchy, and associated deference, that has been broken down by the political rise of the lower castes (Jaffrelot 2003) is reasserted (Waldrop 2004, 99).

Although it would be wrong to assume that slum dwellers are necessarily of low caste²⁶, residents of slums and colonies easily recognise each other as 'the Other', and use 'idioms of class' based on appearance, cleanliness and education (Froystad 2006, 162-164) to distinguish themselves as inhabitants of distinct and exclusive social worlds; however, their lives and lifestyles are entwined and interdependent. The boundaries that exist between slums and colonies are clearly marked but porous, crossed by people from the slums seeking work. The slums against which the middle classes fortify themselves exist to a great extent because of middle class prosperity.

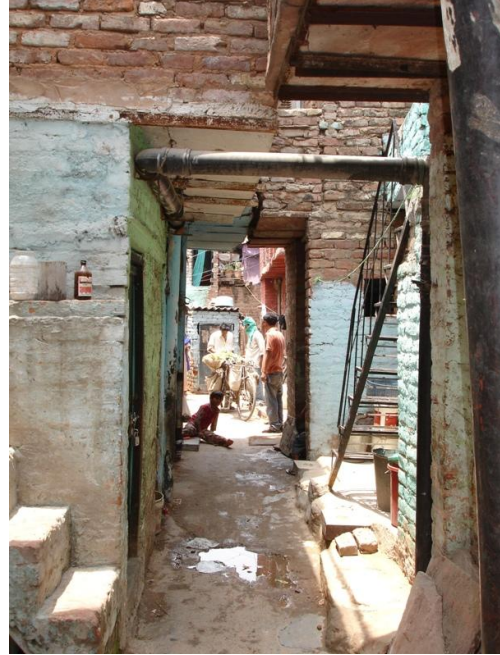
Delhi's Slums and the Informal Working Classes.

Just as Delhi's slums are often hidden from view the catch-all term '*Jhuggi-walle*' or 'slum dwellers' conceals a great deal of differentiation. The people that live in areas that come under the 'Slum and *Jhuggi-Jhonpri*' department of the MCD are by no means a homogenous group. The census of 2001 identified around 600,000 households living in recognised slums in the city (Shiva Kumar and Government of NCT of Delhi 2006, 47) and the character of slum areas varies across the city. Some are sites of industrial production with numerous small home based workshops producing piece rate goods for the wholesale markets of old Delhi; others house workers in the service industries; domestic servants, rickshaw pullers and auto-rickshaw drivers, fruit and

²⁶ Two informants, both residents of a South Delhi Slum, were from higher caste backgrounds and made it clear that this was the case. See chapter 6

vegetable hawkers, stone masons and daily wage labourers, working to service the middle class city and marketplaces around them (Mitra 2003, 49 table 3.5). A significant part of the slum population in the city belongs to the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe category (SC/ST) (Jha, Rao, and Woolcock 2007, 238; Bijulal 2004), while internally slum areas may be divided up by caste, community or religion (Kaur 2001, 214). A large percentage of those living in slum areas are also likely to be migrants from outside the city (Kaur 2001, 212, 2006, 196).

To ground this discussion in my field I will briefly describe the slum in which some of my informants live and where a part of the activities of the *sangathan* (grassroots organisation) that they work for is carried out. Durga Camp is a slum *basti* (neighbourhood) of about 7000 people. It is one of the many slum areas that fit into the interstices of the sprawling middle class cityscape of south Delhi (Peck 2005, 2). A long term resident told me that the slum came up in the early seventies, first as a few unauthorised *kacca* (wood and thatch) houses providing homes to recent migrants labouring on construction projects, and then as an accretion of more solid brick and tin structures many of which now have two storeys (fieldnotes, September 5th 2007). As Kaur notes in her survey of a nearby slum to Durga Camp, where another of my informants lived, there is an active real estate market in the slums with *jhuggis* being bought and sold, and rented out to more recent migrants (2001, 215). This was also the case inside Durga Camp where residents with sufficient capital might extend their houses upwards, or if space was available build new rooms. The houses in the south Delhi slums that I visited usually comprised a downstairs room not any bigger than 2 x 3 metres with either a room or a half shaded terrace built above. Sometimes upper storeys would reach right across the *gali* giving parts of the *basti* a subterranean feel.



(Interior of Durga Camp. Photographs by the author)

Durga Camp is a fairly large slum compared to others in the area, long and narrow, its shape delineated by the depression it sits in. Like many slum areas it has come up on land unusable by the developers of the housing around it (Verma 2002, 69). It is built along a *nullah* (stream) which, like all of the small water courses in Delhi, has become an open drain. As the *nullah* passes through the camp it is channelled into a concrete sided course less than a metre wide that winds behind and sometimes under the houses, appearing now and then as a sluggish stream of stinking brown water. The *nullah* becoming blocked is a perennial problem, and it floods in almost any heavy rain.



(The Durga Camp *nullah* at low ebb. Photographs by the Author)

In many ways Durga Camp might conform to the idea of an ‘affluent slum’ (Kaur 2001, 213-217) in that the residents have some access to education, they might own items such as air coolers, televisions or gas cookers, and households might manage joint incomes of over Rs.3000 (about £37.5) per month with more than one family member working. It is certainly true that there are many inhabitants of Delhi who are considerably worse off than the residents of Durga Camp. However problems caused by the camp’s location, and uncertainty about its continuing existence, are constant concerns for the residents. I do not have access to detailed survey data but, as with other slums in the area, my visits to the camp and conversations with residents suggest that it contains a mixture of religious and caste communities (fieldnotes, June 19th 2007).

Although Durga Camp is seen as problem, not least by the local councillor who described it to me as a ‘headache’ (interview, October 13th 2007), it is also well integrated into the economic life of the middle class residential areas around it. People from Durga Camp work as hawkers of fruit, vegetables and other essentials, as *dhobis*

(washermen), casual domestic labour, skilled and unskilled labour for construction, and drivers of rickshaws, auto-rickshaws, and sometimes of middle class cars. Although the profiles of the other slums close Durga Camp that I visited might differ slightly, there are variations in size and cultural homogeneity (fieldnotes, June 19th 2007), the class position and economic integration of the inhabitants of the different slums is broadly similar.

Access to education is variable. While Delhi has a higher than the national average literacy rate and a well developed system of government primary schools (Shiva Kumar and Government of NCT of Delhi 2006, 22-23) which children from Delhi's 'urban poor' might attend, there are also significant numbers who are out of school (Banerji 2000). Some children are educated to 10th and 12th class in the Hindi medium system, and one of my central informants had been to a Hindi medium college of Delhi University and completed a geography degree, but this was extraordinary amongst his peers. On very rare occasions, if parents can somehow arrange for their children to get one of the reserved places guaranteed by government funding, a slum-dwelling child might go to one of Delhi's English medium private schools (see the case of Padma in chapter 6). Despite the inadequacies of the education system in the city, and the difficulties of life in the slums, education remains important. It is not only the middle classes who are conscious of the need to gain educational credentials. On several occasions their children's education was cited by slum-dwelling informants as one of the main reasons for remaining in the city. From my observations of people visiting Right to Information advocacy groups to receive help in preparing forms and applications it is clear that many slum dwelling adults are at a significant disadvantage when trying to deal with bureaucratic procedures that require the skills of *padhe-likhe* (reading and writing)

Although unauthorised, slum areas can be 'regularised', that is, recognised by the state and overseen by departments designated to look after the provision of sanitation, water supplies and garbage disposal, although often these commitments are not honoured (Pande 2008). Slum dwellers also make residence rights in the city more concrete

through applying for subsidised rations provided by the government Public Distribution System (PDS), and by registering as voters. Possession of a ration card or voter ID proving residence can be essential in the event of a slum eviction, offering the possibility of space being allotted in a resettlement colony. Access to water and power connections are usually mediated through a *pradhan* (chief), a local or community leader who brokers deals with local politicians, state representatives and utility company officials to ensure the daily functioning of the slum (Sethi 2006a; Jha, Rao, and Woolcock 2007, 235). Slums may have multiple *pradhans* with different connections or expertise. Where access to electricity has been arranged homes in the slums that I visited might have a television, perhaps a fan, or occasionally a small 'desert cooler' for the hottest of the summer months.

While segregation in the city is more often directed downwards, i.e. the poor are kept out of upper class spaces unless they have a job to do there; it is also the case that slum areas have their own type of exclusivity. Narrow and hard to find entrances, complicated layouts and rough reputations all discourage outsiders from going inside. Entrance may depend on invitations or arrangements, and even though a slum *basti* (neighbourhood) is ostensibly a public space, a visit from an outsider, particularly a foreigner, may well be escorted from start to finish. For middle class people wishing to engage services from slum areas there is little need to actually enter the slum itself. *Jhuggi*-dwelling daily labourers wait with their tools on the roadsides, or close to shops supplying building materials, hoping to be engaged. Residents of *bastis* such as Durga Camp working in the middle class streets and houses nearby, including my activist informants, also act as points of contact for middle class people seeking daily labour.

In case my use of the term slum-dweller sounds pejorative, suggesting what one commentator calls

'a way of life, a subculture with a set of norms and values which is reflected in poor sanitation and health practices, deviant behaviour and characteristic attributes of apathy and social isolation' (Mitra 2003, 28)

then I should be quite clear that the part of my work carried out with people living in slum areas does nothing to support this. Poor sanitation and health were definitely concerns for slum residents that I met, but rather as a function of the physical location of slum areas and lack of resources, not because of some deviant subculture. The slum-dwellers I encountered did not appear any more or less deviant than my own upper middle class neighbours, and, at least in the case of my activist informants, were certainly not apathetic about their situations. I will use the term slum or *jhuggi* -dweller, along with the term 'informal working class' (Harriss 2006), as it reflects the awareness that my slum-dwelling informants have of their own, often precarious, position in the city, and of the ways that others view them.

On several occasions I had informants ask me what I thought of where they lived, or whether I thought of them as dirty, or if I had drunk the water while visiting homes in the slum. People that live in slums know that they are slum-dwellers but this does not mean that they lack dignity. Instead their position in, and relation to, the socio-political organisation of city is often expressed in 'idioms of class' (Froystad 2005, 95) that reflect an appreciation of the value of social and cultural capital. The terms *chote log* and *bare log* (small people and big people) are highly relevant to my slum-dwelling informants. In the city they know that they are considered small, and are very aware of how big people, those with power, influence or connections (2005, 120), might be able help them, a factor that has implications for those attempting to foster particular models of active citizenship and participation in low income areas of the city.

The City of the Middle and Lower Middle classes

As with other areas of India, a rise in state salaries, the reservation of government occupations for lower caste groups, remittances from family members working abroad, and the green revolution have contributed to the expansion of the middle class in Delhi (Mazzarella 2005, 1-2). More recently the rise in land prices and construction projects caused by the city's expansion has helped those better positioned to benefit from policies of liberalisation in the 1980's and 1990's to develop new businesses (Mawdsley 2004, 85), and the boom in call centre work and new technology industries

has provided a new sector employing workers with the necessary educational credentials.

The colonies and neighbourhoods which house the middle and lower middle fractions of the middle class (Fernandes and Heller 2006, 500) in Delhi are far less exclusive, denser, more congested and with less green space than the elite areas. In areas of publicly built housing, such as those in east Delhi where some of my informants lived, there is a little more space built into the developments. But, in some lower middle class 'private' colonies space is severely limited. Some sections of larger colonies may be gated reflecting the differentiation between income levels within these sections of the city. But many remain open, and contain some of Delhi's most popular markets for buying clothes, electronic goods and modern cooking utensils.

Car ownership is increasing in these areas but many more families have access to motor bikes or scooters and use public transport when necessary. Mobile phone use and access to satellite or cable television is ubiquitous, but computer ownership less so. If a family has a computer in the house then it is less likely to be connected to the internet. Among younger middle and lower middle class people the internet might be accessed through the many, and busy, neighbourhood cyber-cafes²⁷ or sometimes in the workplace. The international standard entertainment and medical infrastructure designed for the upper middle class and elite is much less accessible to this group for reasons of expense. However, there are a huge variety of markets, restaurants and cinemas which do cater for them, and a burgeoning privatised sector for health care and education aimed specifically at this fraction of the middle class (Fernandes 2006, 134).

This is a literate and aspirational group, but while knowledge of English is very significant in allowing people access to higher paid work in government departments and the new technology industries, many of those, particularly of the older generation are Hindi speaking people involved in business, particularly those retailing consumer goods, supplying construction materials or organising services and catering. Informants

²⁷ For more detail on Cybercafes as social spaces in middle class India see the work of Nicholas Nesbitt on youth in Bangalore (2006)

and friends in my local market in Delhi fit into this category, often having little knowledge of English but undoubtedly living middle class lives. It is middle class Hindi speaking parents like these, keen for their children to do well, that support the huge number of private schools offering an English medium education (Fernandes 2006, 133). Although it is true that these schools are of varying quality often producing students who use English and can decipher English script, but may lack the fluency necessary for call centres working with US or UK clients. Thus this group are very much members of the *padhe/likhe* (educated) classes. Educational credentialing is very important to them and they are acutely conscious that skill with English allows access to professional training, economic benefits and maintains cultural privilege, but their ability to work in those fields is variable. Indeed, ability to speak English may vary within families. The family of a friend who lived in a market area nearby to my flat in Delhi exemplify this.

Sachin is a young middle class man of around 20 years old who had tried out for a call centre job but had not passed the probationary period. While he can speak some English it was not good enough for telephone work. To earn himself some money Sachin ran a toy stall from the space in the front of the family home in a busy parade of shops by one of South Delhi's main arterial roads. The space was shared with his uncle's business selling ice by the block. Sachin's unmarried sister on the other hand spoke English fluently and worked for a banking call centre handling international clients. She had visited the UK for training, something that Sachin dreamed of doing, and drove a second-hand car to work. Sachin's father, an astrologer, ran a consultation service from the house, and the family also rented a space within the house to the restaurant next door to house an electricity generator. Sachin's family are certainly middle class and yet do not have a great deal of security. They paid no rent for the house that they lived in as its ownership is in dispute, and since I left the field they have had to move as the southward extension of the Delhi Metro project has meant that the market has been partially demolished.

The shop and restaurant owners that I met while spending time with Sachin at his stall in the market were quite definitely middle class, but also closely involved in the street life of the city. They run businesses that bring them into contact with a wide variety of people, and require them to organise manual labour, deliveries and contract work. Of the transparency and accountability activists that I encountered in Delhi those from the middle and lower middle classes were most often working for NGOs or *sangathans* located in the north and east of the city and close to the cities border with Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh reflecting to some extent the class character and spatial organisation of those areas. Some of these activists were educated Hindi speaking migrants who had come to the city seeking work in the NGO sector and journalism. Vikram for example was from a farming family in Uttar Pradesh and had come to the city after his first degree to complete a masters degree in political science and a further course in journalism. He had taken up work at the NGO that we encounter in Chapter 7, but he was keen to gain further credentials, particularly those which would improve his English as he felt that he was held back from progressing in the NGO scene in this respect (interview, March 2007) Others were local people who had lived in east Delhi for some time and had operated small businesses or had been in education while volunteering for activist organisations. The success of some these organisations had attracted funding which allowed some of these volunteers to take up activist or NGO work full time. For these activists, as much as any other middle or lower middle class informants that I encountered in the city, the social and cultural capital accessed through educational credentials were significant factors in how they perceived themselves and their opportunities within the ‘civil society’ scene. Educational background, qualifications and aspirations were a common theme in activist life histories, and grassroots rhetoric about equality and participation notwithstanding, these provided a valuable insight into the economy of practices and class distinctions (Bourdieu 1984) operating within the transparency and accountability activism scene.

Considering the descriptions of the politics of class and space in the city that I have provided above it is appropriate at this point to raise the work of Partha Chatterjee on civil and political society (2001, 2004, 38-41). Chatterjee outlines civil and political society as conceptual fields related to the functioning of democratic politics in India. Briefly his thesis is that the *idea* of ‘civil society’ relates to citizens within nation states for whom rights are guaranteed by formal laws and constitutions. In these terms everyone is a citizen with equal rights and can be regarded as a member of civil society. The state should interact with these individuals or their associations through the political process. However, Chatterjee proposes that most of the population of India are only tenuously rights bearing citizens in these terms. As such they are regarded by the institutions of the state not as citizens but as a population that must be looked after and controlled by different government agencies. This places people in a political relationship with the state which does not necessarily conform to the ideal relationship between the state and members of civil society set out in the constitution (2004, 38-39, 2001, 172). For examples of these political relationships Chatterjee turns to populations in India’s cities who ‘transgress the strict lines of legality in struggling to live and work’ (2004, 40), people who might live in illegal squatter settlements and use illegal water or electricity supplies. State agencies cannot ignore these people or their associations as they represent so many whose livelihoods and living circumstances violate the law, and who do have legitimate claims to welfare rights guaranteed by the constitution. But at the same time agencies cannot treat these people as citizens in the formal sense as this would be to encourage further violations of property rights and civic law. For Chatterjee the result of this impasse is the creation of the field of ‘political society’ in which claims on the state, for example for welfare or livelihood, are negotiated through intermediaries. Within political society groups have to make connections with similar or more influential groups, with government functionaries, political parties and leaders, often using voting rights to assert popular demands (2004, 41). For Chatterjee then, civil society is restricted to an bourgeois elite of culturally equipped “‘proper’” citizens (2004, 41, 67, 2001, 174) as compared to ‘denizens’, people in the informal working classes who can be ‘done unto’ and lack the civic responsibilities and rights of citizenship (Harriss 2006, 462, 2007, 2719).

These concepts are both powerful and persuasive, and provide useful terminology with which to understand and discuss the politics of space in the city, they also chime very well with my earlier discussion of the interpenetration of the everyday state and society, in that we find a similar contrast between the *ideal* of civil society and the actuality of political society. However, I would agree with Corbridge et al (2005) when they propose that ‘like all binary distinctions this one is overdrawn’ (2005, 256). In Delhi so much commercial activity and building is “unauthorised”, and there are constant struggles and mediation over what will be “regularised”, and this even amongst elite sections of the city’s population who might otherwise consider themselves citizens in Chatterjee’s sense. So perhaps, as Corbridge et al suggest, what really matters when considering civil and political society is ‘how mediation occurs and to what extent and how it promotes (and draws upon) ideas of citizenship’ (2005, 256), and related to this, how initiatives promoted by proponents of good governance might create new spaces for empowerment and citizenship within political society (2005, 258).

In looking at the transparency and accountability activism scene in Delhi we might find examples of both civil and political society, particularly in organisations where upper middle class and elite actors are working in coalition with people from the informal working classes (see chapter 6). We will see that the conceptual frameworks that Chatterjee outlines as civil and political society have relevance for activists attempting to work along non-party lines, those wishing to avoid falling into ‘the dirty river of politics’ (Harriss 2006, 461, 2007, 2722), but also that mediation, including political mediation, is an essential part of the activist project, without which little might be achieved.

So how do the relationships between class and space outlined in this chapter structure my field? The social and physical boundaries existing in the city present my activist informants with some ‘ground realities’ to engage with. To operate activists must be able to work in different spaces and their ability to do this is partly structured by who they are. Activist *karyakarte* (social workers) of both genders from the informal

working classes, who are at home in the slum areas, are essential to carry out the day to day work of a grassroots group, but often they are less comfortable in the social spaces in which policies are produced, funding arranged and media contacts negotiated (see chapter 6). Middle and Upper middle class activists usually carry out this ‘policy’ work, but, if they wish to work at the grassroots they must be willing, and also able, to cross the social boundaries of the city. The necessity for my informant’s projects to operate in different social spaces in the city, inscribed by class distinction, means that upper middle class and slum-dwelling activists need each other if projects are to be organised. But, as we shall see, although the crossing of social boundaries into different social spaces plays an important role in the activist scene, these crossings do not break down social boundaries or distinctions between classes.

To reiterate the quotation from Castells at the beginning of this chapter ‘Space is not a reflection of society, it is its expression’ (1996, 1:410). As a field researcher working through these spaces I am as involved in the spatialised hierarchies of the city as any other agent. As transparency and accountability activism in the city is structured by space and class, so too is my access to the field, producing implications for methodology and it is to these issues which I will now turn.

Chapter 3: Who, Where and How: Reflecting on the Field, Access and Methodology

Encountering Activists

Upon arriving in Delhi in 2006 I made initial contact with a number of organisations that I thought might offer avenues for research. Searches for organisations in my local area of south Delhi led to contacts with activist groups involved in promoting the use of the Right to Information. The networks of activists that I encountered through my contact with the Right to Information scene led me to a cross-section of Delhi society, a wide variety of social spaces and situations, and a busy field with which to engage. Also in the early days of planning my research, including a short exploratory visit to Delhi and Uttaranchal in 2005, I had contacted the Indian office of a leading international anti-corruption NGO and I revisited this organisation when I returned to Delhi. This contact also led in unexpected directions and connected me too a Gandhian group of “grey” activists with members from the upper levels of Delhi Society (see chapter 7). Although I did manage to arrange a number of interviews with bureaucrats and political representatives the contingent nature of developing contacts and negotiating access in the field, particularly in such a hierarchical and spatially segregated city as Delhi has led to this becoming, to the greatest extent, an ethnography of ‘civil society’ activism.

I am using ‘activist’ as a generic term to refer to people that are involved in the transparency and accountability scene as individuals and as members of groups. By activists I simply mean those people willing to spend their time and resources doing the work of promoting transparency and accountability. I realise that the term may suggest a particular type of modern Indian middle class identity (Harriss 2006, 461), or that it can be used pejoratively by those suspicious of foreign influence and funding (Rajan and Kak 2006). Activism and activist are often replaced by other terms with historical and religious connotations such as ‘social service’ or ‘social worker’ (Joshi 2001, 143; Watt 2005). Some middle class activists that I encountered refer to themselves as

‘crusaders’, and grassroots activist groups often use terms such as ‘community mobiliser’, or simply *karyakarte* (social workers) to describe those carrying out day to day activities. Where possible I will incorporate the terms used by my informants to refer to themselves, but I will continue to use activist as a broad term to describe those whose work in the transparency and accountability activism scene is anchored to a central principle. Which is, that transparency and accountability mechanisms are essential tools for rebalancing the power relationship between elected and appointed agents of the constitutional state and its citizens, securing citizens’ rights vis a vis the state, and for promoting active citizenship.

Scenes and ‘Movements’.

Within my field a number of different ‘scenes’ intersect or nest within each other, incorporating groups and individuals from different social backgrounds, and with different interests and political agendas. For example the Right to Information scene in Delhi, from which I draw much of my data, is part of a wider transparency and accountability scene that includes groups campaigning on issues such as democratic reforms, judicial accountability and integrity in government and business and brings together individuals and groups from the secular left and liberal right of politics. Leading actors in this broad scene may be involved across a number of different groups and have connections to government and international funding agencies; in other places in the scene, at the “grassroots”, actors may be focused on the micro politics of the governance of small areas of the city. The coherence and connectivity of the transparency and accountability scene, such as it is, can be difficult to grasp, although it may be partly revealed at large meetings and conferences where grassroots groups, their internationally mobile leaders, policy makers and representatives from government and the media come together.

My use of the term ‘scene’ emerges from a struggle over whether to refer to the transparency and accountability activism I encountered as a ‘movement’. As Leslie

Calman, writing about women's movement politics in India, notes activists 'often demur when asked if there is an Indian women's *movement*. The question seems to them to imply a singular unified entity, perhaps with one guiding ideology and a compact leadership group' (1992, 4). But Calman asserts that as a movement is a collective effort to seek change, to transform the state or move it to action, and to improve participants' lives through the act of movement participation itself, that the women's movement is exactly that. She goes on;

'Within a movement there may be a number of movement organizations with identifiable movement leaders and members, as well as unaffiliated individuals who sympathize with the goals of such organizations, and who may intermittently contribute time and money, or be mobilized by those groups for particular political actions: demonstrations, letter writing campaigns, and the like. Thus Indian women activists are mistaken when they think that the decentralized character of their activities constitutes a nonmovement; that quality is, in fact, more typical of movements than not' (1992, 5)

Calman's description fits very well with some of my experience of the transparency and accountability scene, but still I am reluctant to label it a movement because of the politically charged nature of the term and because of the different ways that it is used in activist and academic discourse. Within my field the Right to Information scene includes groups and individuals who positively identify themselves as being part of a Right to Information 'movement' (*andolan* in Hindi), explicitly referencing a particular style of pro poor, non party, voluntary political action at the 'grassroots' (Omvedt 1993, 190-191; Kamat 2002, 19; Baviskar 2010, 134; Kothari 1990, 2:402) and with it a particular network of alliances and resources. What Sheth describes as a genre of 'social movements' which pursue a 'long-term goal of democratizing development and transforming society' (2004, 45)

However, the Right to Information scene also involves a number of people who have become involved for quite individual reasons unconnected to 'movement' politics, or

perhaps because they are members of Delhi's many middle class Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs), another scene in itself, and have attempted to use the Right to Information to address governance issues in their local areas. Some of these people are extremely suspicious of the motives of those involved in 'movement' politics, perhaps because of some activists' and groups' connections to the political left, because of 'movement' activists support for the rights of slum-dwellers and other marginalised groups in the city, or because they suspect hypocrisy in the organisation of funding of the 'movement' sections of the Right to Information scene. Thus although the transparency and accountability scene does contain people involved in 'movement' activism, the term does not encompass the scene as a whole. Local groups working at the grassroots within this 'movement' part of the Right to Information scene may also refer to themselves as 'people's movements' using the English term, or more often as a citizens' *sangathan* or *samstha* (organisation or society). When I am referring to groups working in this way I will use the term *sangathan*²⁸.

For Harriss (2006) interlinked rights based campaigning groups with 'movement' associations such as the Right to Food Campaign, The Campaign for the Right to Education and the Campaign for the Right to Information,

'are not engaged in mass mobilization, and are not "social movements" in the accepted sense of this term. They are more or less effective campaigning and lobbying organizations usually centered around particular NGOs.' (2006, 463)

In my experience this is as true of the transparency and accountability scene that I encountered as Calman's definition of a movement. Perhaps it is the broad appeal and applicability of the idea of transparency and accountability, and the depoliticised and technical nature of the mechanisms designed to foster them, that attracts strange political bedfellows (Baviskar 2010, 147). Legislation directed at transparency and accountability is provided for the use of Indian citizens whatever their class, status or political affiliation, but it is class, status and political affiliation that often determines the uses to which transparency and accountability legislation is put.

²⁸ Also see Baviskar 2010 on the connections between *sangathans* and *andolans* and their different roles in mobilising activism during the 1980s and 1990s (Baviskar 2010, 134)

Sociologically I could choose to label the transparency and accountability activism scene as a ‘new social movement’, as Dipankar Gupta’s puts it;

‘what is new about the new social movements is that while they oppose overbearing and unresponsive governments in power they have no desire to question the legitimacy of the modern state, or to directly take over state power. They remain firmly rooted within [...] intermediate institutions and work to keep them active so that they do not fall into disuse from either complacency or neglect.’ (Gupta, 2000: 165).

Again in general terms this works as a description of the transparency and accountability activism scene, but I am not convinced that reviewing the vast literature on new social movements will advance my arguments particularly. Ethnographically, my concern is not in determining whether the transparency and accountability scene, or the Right to Information scene, constitutes a ‘new social movement’ or not. Rather encounters with my informants reveal that, to paraphrase Corbridge et al (2005), people’s ‘sighting’ of the scene, how it comes into view depends very much on how they are positioned socially.

Transparency and Accountability Activism in the City: Grassroots Sangathans.

I had been aware of the Right to Information campaign in India through the work of Rob Jenkins and Anne-Marie Goetz (1999; 2001; 2003) but pre-fieldwork had identified this issue more with Rajasthan and the much publicised work of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) than with my work on anti-corruption in Delhi. However, early visits to two south Delhi based organisations, one an international NGO, and the other a grassroots *sangathan*, profoundly affected the course of my fieldwork leading to a strong focus on groups associated with the Right to Information. At the suggestion of a contact at the international NGO I went along to an organising meeting for an upcoming national Right to Information campaign and there met people who would become some of my most important informants and gatekeepers in both the Delhi and national Right to Information scenes. My contact with the *sangathan* also led me into the Right to Information world, but in this case into the everyday work and social dynamics of a grassroots group focussed on local issues.

The South Delhi *sangathan* works as a coalition between upper middle class professionals and working class slum dwellers and operates within a relatively small area of the city. The time I spent with this *sangathan* took me into the marginal spaces between the middle class colonies of south Delhi, introducing me to the people that live and work there providing the labour and services that the middle class lifestyle depends upon. I also spent time visiting *Parivartan*, a well known Right to Information *sangathan* engaging with similar issues and based in a working class manufacturing area of North East Delhi that has been the subject of research by other scholars (Mentschel 2005; Jenkins 2007; Pande 2008; Baviskar 2010), and another Right to Information *sangathan* doing similar work in the same area. My time with these groups, composed of people from very different backgrounds whose relationships and roles in the organisations were very much structured by class and social and cultural capital, prompted my initial realisation that these would be significant issues in my study. As my contacts expanded I also began to encounter people associated with middle class Residents Welfare Associations in the city, some working closely with the Right to Information network and others connected to middle class RWA activist coalitions involved in campaigns concerning the development of the city, infrastructure and political representation.

Local groups such as the *sangathans* and the RWAs are focused on the minutiae of life in the city, using legal mechanisms like the Right to Information to intercede in a wide range of issues, particularly those relating to interactions with the local state. As facets of anti-corruption transparency and accountability mechanisms such as the Right to Information become a means through which people try to assert legitimacy and rights to space in the city. Organisation and practice around these issues links activist groups with different political projects and class bases. If transparency and accountability activism is part of attempts to reorder power and citizenship in the nation, then at this level it is practised in part as attempts by different social groups to improve the local state and infrastructure and assert citizenship in the city itself.

The City as the Nation: Activists Working at the Policy Level.

My field also encompasses groups and activists based in Delhi that work on a national stage. As the capital city and the home of the national parliament and central government Delhi symbolises the unity of a cosmopolitan Indian republic and the concentration of secular rational power. The city reserves space for and hosts the yearly secular rituals through which nationhood is expressed and renewed, Republic Day in January and Independence Day in August. It marks the passing of great national leaders by preserving museums in their honour, and its roads, markets and neighbourhoods are a litany of names, dates and events from the struggle for independence and the building of the nation, sober reminders of national memory and solidarity (Roy 2007, 66). If the other great Indian ‘metros’ have their defining characteristics, Mumbai for entertainment, Kolkata for intellectualism, Bangalore for technology, then Delhi is the seat of bureaucratic, military and political power, the city literally referred to as ‘the Centre’.

Surrounding and attached to the organs of the state the city also hosts the country offices of multi and bi-lateral development organisations and funding foundations, the leading print and electronic media groups, influential universities and academic networks. The transparency and accountability activism network connects to these institutions at its ‘policy’ level, where Anglophone upper middle class and elite members of the groups I encountered step up to operate on the national stage, sometimes becoming nationally prominent as individuals. At the national policy level we find groups such as the National Campaign for People’s Right to Information (NCPRI), the national umbrella organisation for Right to Information organisations, including local groups from Delhi, which played a central role in drafting and high level lobbying for the passing of the RTI act 2005. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), responsible for the successful Public Interest Litigation (PIL) demanding that prospective electoral candidates should declare their criminal records and assets before standing. Transparency International India (TII), the Indian Chapter of the world’s leading anti-corruption NGO, and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), an international NGO working on the Right to Information and

police reform. These groups are interconnected and play coordinating and linking roles between national networks of grassroots activists and the higher levels of the state. They include extremely well connected individuals rich in social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986: 243-252), who have the skills necessary to lobby to the highest levels in government and take part in English language policy discussions where space is reserved for 'civil society'. I would agree with Raymond Apthorpe (1997) that the language and writing of policy function as a type of power, and in India participation in this process is also a sure signifier of social class and status.

Delhi also provides a stage on which national level meetings, protests and campaigns are held. These events bring figures from wider activist networks based outside Delhi into the city. During my fieldwork I had the opportunity to attend two major conferences organised by the national Right to Information campaign, attended by grassroots and policy level activists from around the country, as well as smaller meetings organised by Delhi based groups attended by activists from neighbouring states. I also travelled to events outside of the city following Delhi based informants. On one occasion having been asked to speak at a conference on electoral reform in Uttar Pradesh I arrived to find a large number of familiar faces from my field in Delhi, useful confirmation that I was in the right place. These types of events provided an excellent opportunity to see groups promoting their work to each other and observe the social dynamics within the activist scene, being particularly revealing of class differences between those working at the grassroots and policy levels. Many of those operating at this national level are well connected to the elite levels of power in Delhi, having held high positions, or being related to those in high positions, in the civil service, law, military and police, or through elite academic networks. If the *aam log* (common people) are invoked as the beneficiaries of transparency and accountability activism, and as the drivers of grassroots action (see the discussion of activist rhetoric in chapter 7), then for those working at the policy level it helps to be rather more *khas* (special) than common.

Translocal and Transnational Aspects of Transparency and Accountability Activism.

There are also translocal and transnational elements to my field, extensions to the policy level work of activists and groups in which connections between activism and international funding, NGO and academic networks become more visible. These elements emerge in different ways. Funding streams to grassroots groups in the activism scene flow from development NGOs based in the Indian diaspora, particularly in the US. Fellowships are provided to activists by NGOs and international social entrepreneurship organisations such as the Ashoka Foundation. Registered NGOs in the transparency and accountability scene are funded by a variety of international donors, including the Ford Foundation. Some activists are in a position to apply for academic or development research funding into their areas of interest and others have received international awards for their work with funding attached. Recognition like this generates opportunities for leading figures to travel internationally to speak about their work and gather further financial support. These transnational funding connections directly affect the lives of my informants and the way that activism is carried out in Delhi, and nationally. I will try to capture something of these connections and flows in the later chapters, although as they reach beyond my field my ability to do is necessarily limited.

The activist scene in Delhi also offers opportunities for expatriates to work for organisations in the city. Schemes for expatriates of Indian origin who want to participate in development work in India send volunteers to join both grassroots and policy groups working in the transparency and accountability scene. Through one international NGO based in Delhi I met European and Australian expatriates working in Delhi on national and international anti-corruption issues. The relocation of the NGO's head office from London to Delhi and its policy of paying all staff a local wage meant that the expatriate staff tended to be young graduates seeking 'in country' experience in the human rights and development field before moving on to better paid work.

Academic study and research networks offer opportunities for some of my informants to travel outside India, to attend foreign universities as doctoral students and research

associates. In some cases the notional boundary between ‘field’ and ‘home’ collapsed as key informants visited Sussex to take up scholarships or research posts working on projects that document and investigate civil society action in India.

Within this translocal and transnational category I must also include online communities that focus on the Right to Information and corruption issues in India. The Internet is essentially transnational, and although these communities are almost entirely focussed on India and often nationalistic in content they have an international membership, and some of those responsible for moderating are based outside of India. Online message boards and blogs offer a semi-public space through which groups and individuals discuss issues, ask questions and argue over policy and practice (see chapter 7). Enmities as well as friendships are played out, especially through the participation of iconoclastic individuals who use mechanisms like the Right to Information to question the government, but are highly suspicious of the politics of the organised “activist” scene. Internet based transparency and accountability activism is certainly a middle class pursuit. Despite the blossoming of internet cafes in India effective participation in, or monitoring of, online communities requires some skill with English, and for the more active members a fast internet connection in the home or office. The number of people using the internet to this extent in India is comparatively small and fast connections are expensive. Even though it is reported that India has 81 million people using the internet²⁹, the resources necessary for daily involvement or moderation of an active message board are beyond all but a very few of those.

Studying Through, Multilocality and Multivocality: A Research Method for the City

If boundaries between spaces and classes in Delhi are as strong as I suggested in chapter 2 and those divisions shape how transparency and accountability activism is practised then how can we trace how activist projects might operate and translate across the city’s social spaces? Perhaps we can begin to answer this by paying attention to four elements; power, place, voice and flows.

²⁹ See <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm> (accessed 24th October 2010)

As Shore and Wright point out when discussing fieldwork in their volume on the anthropology of policy;

‘It is no longer a question of studying a local community or ‘a people’; rather the anthropologist is seeking a method for analysing connections between levels and forms of social process and action and exploring how those processes work in different sites – local, national and global.’ (1997, 14)

They go on to explain that this should not be limited to what Laura Nader called ‘studying up’ (1972) when she appealed for anthropology to turn its gaze on corporate and governmental elites at the centres of power, in contrast to its traditional focus on exotic peripheries (Gusterson 1997, 116; Clifford 1997, 213). Rather, citing Reinhold (1994, 477-9), they suggest that the anthropologist should ‘study through’ in order to trace the ways that power ‘creates webs and relations between actors, institutions and discourses across time and space’ (Shore and Wright 1997, 14).

In engaging with power we must also engage with place. For Margaret Rodman; ‘Places are not inert containers. They are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions’ (Rodman 2003, 205). By examining transparency and accountability activism in Delhi we must engage with multiple localities and see how its meaning is constructed, incorporated and transformed by multiple agents in different contexts (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 5), and what the consequences are (Marcus 1998, 25-26) for those who act (who are literally ‘activists’) according to those meanings. If as I have argued in the first chapter, transparency and accountability activism is partly a project to create active citizens, and activists are those who identify with and promote this process, then a focus on place, and with it class, helps to reveal agency and limitations in the actions of informants (Rodman 2003, 212) (see chapter 6). It also requires the ethnographer to be reflexive about the limitations of the study, particularly regarding access.

Multi-locality implies multi-vocality, linking voices to places and histories, and noting the narration of the self in relation to social and physical spaces (Rodman 2003, 214-215). My informants construct narratives of the city, power and space in particular

ways and from different points of view, but often using similar frames (see chapters 4 and 7). An encounter with the local state might be experienced differently depending on social class, but narrated using general terms describing a dissatisfaction with bureaucracy; or a discourse of rights might be employed by different social groups with different ends in mind (see chapter 6). Within this, particularly in relation to the activist world at the centre of my ethnography, a focus on rhetoric brings argument, persuasion and negotiation to the fore, and helps to reveal the micro-politics of the field (Carrithers 2005, 578) (see chapter 7).

Finally, in order to avoid creating a picture in which boundaries between spaces are made to seem too impervious we must take into account the flows of exchange, interaction, resources and information that connect spaces through networks, prompting activities and organisation building in specific localities (Castells 1996, 1:410-413) (see chapters 5, 6 and 8). If for example transparency and accountability activism is a 'key function' (1996, 1:413) in an international network of groups and individuals focused on liberal forms of development then local organisations may focus on specific elements within it such political accountability, electoral reform, or Right to Information legislation, modified by local historical circumstances.

Reflecting on Access

While planning my research in the pre-fieldwork stage I had always been aware of a potential paradox. That is, that people interested in promoting transparency may not necessarily be more open about their own lives or the strategies and social connections that they use in their work than others. Inevitably this was the case, although some groups did extend wide ranging access to meetings and documentation there were limitations to my inclusion in private discussions, particularly where problems within groups or networks had arisen. Where I had become more familiar to informants, or relationships could be negotiated on a more equal footing, participant observation was possible. But the difficulty of gaining unmediated access to some informants, because of their status, or the spaces in the city in which they live or work, meant that often

fieldwork had to be carried out ‘by appointment’ (Desjarlais 2003, 18). This was as true of a visit to a slum with resident Right to Information workers as it was arranging time with the elite figures in my field. Meetings with some high level informants took months to arrange, often because they were out of the city or abroad for long periods, or once arranged were broken without warning. People at all levels in Delhi society are not much impressed by doctoral students, nor should they be, and I learned not to expect to be treated as a high priority. However, I did find that once people began to speak they would often engage well with the semi-structured and conversational nature of the interviews.

My position as a *videshi* (foreigner/outsider) also raised a number of different issues in the field. My presence could be read differently according to the setting. Visiting Durga Camp on a day when problems with an accumulation of garbage in the *nullah* had come to a head and some of the residents, including my activist informants, were trying to organise for an MCD sanitation department team to clean it, some people assumed that I was an expert from a development organisation seeking to ‘fix’ (*thik karna*) the problem (field notes June 14th 2007). A meeting with an NGO representative early on in my attempts to make contacts started with polite enquiries about my sources of funding and questions as to whether my donors would be able to help the NGO with its perennial shortage of money (Field notes January 19th 2006). An arrangement made during an interview with the head of a government institute training officials in ‘good governance’ practice, to attend some training sessions, had to be cancelled when my affiliating institution in Delhi failed to answer an enquiry as to whether I was a bona fide scholar. Trying to rearrange a meeting in which I could present supporting documents to prove my status I was told that the training institute ‘could only interact with a foreigner through the Ministry of External Affairs’ (field notes, July 26th 2007).

I also encountered some xenophobic reactions to my presence as a foreign researcher. Although these were limited to email attacks by a particular person posted to internet message boards concerning the Right to Information, and copied to other informants, the effect was to limit my interactions with some of those people that I thought might

be close to my antagonist. Often these attacks were aimed obliquely through me at friends and informants in the activist scene that the emailer wished to expose as guilty by association. While these attacks caused a great deal of stress (my partner had left her job in the UK to join me and for a while our stay in India seemed under threat) they also had the effect of further cementing relationships with some informants. Although I became very familiar with, and in, my local area of the city, developing friendships with informants inside and outside the activism scene I must admit that every single day I spent in the field I was reminded, on multiple occasions, and usually in the friendliest way, that I was a *videshi* (foreigner/outsider). I do not say this with a sense of disappointment, just with an acknowledgement that my being English, white, and male inevitably affected the way that different informants read my interests and intentions.

Language was also an issue, and revealing of the demographic profile of my informants. Although I had received training in speaking and reading Hindi and continued to develop my skills while in Delhi, my abilities were often redundant; a very large number of my informants were middle class and spoke English. However, in my work with slum dwelling and lower middle class activists, often migrants from Rajasthan, Bihar or Uttar Pradesh speaking Hindi less easily recognised by me, I employed a series of research assistants to help with the translation and transcription of interviews and field recordings³⁰. Although negotiating the field with an assistant could be frustrating, sometimes meaning that I had to move more slowly around the city than I would have liked, when the relationship worked well a field situation such as a busy *sangathan* meeting could be analysed through two sets of notes, picking up the flow of language and emotional tone, and often with a field recording that could be cross checked and transcribed later on.

A typical day in the field might begin with a visit to a slum area such as Durga Camp, or to a *sangathan* meeting or open office where people come seeking help with

³⁰ I am grateful to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for a small grant (No. GR7429) to contribute to the cost of research assistance while in the field

paperwork or problems with local bureaucrats or the police. It might continue with an appointment at an NGO office in a middle class colony, or a visit to the ‘posh’ private home of an upper middle class informant to record an interview. Depending on the person meetings with informants in public spaces might take place over a glass of tea by the roadside, or in a chain coffee shop in an expensive market. Hours might be spent moving around the city between meetings on various forms of public transport. The evening might be spent preparing food and talking at the flat of an informant and friend, or in one of south Delhi’s expensive bars with the young expatriate employees of an international NGO, or perhaps at my own home in a south Delhi colony viewing the discussions on one of the busy internet list-serves that offer forums for Right to Information campaigners across India. As a result following the transparency and accountability activism scene in Delhi required an approach conforming more to what Gusterson calls ‘polymorphous engagement’, in which the ethnographer interacts with informants ‘across a number of dispersed sites, not just in local communities and sometimes in virtual form’ (1997: 116).

This engagement with the city and the activism scene has produced 2600 pages of my own field notes, plus 400 pages of field notes from research assistants. These pages include written notes for interviews where recording was not possible, descriptions of activist meetings and encounters in the city, reflections on fieldwork and early attempts at analysis. I have constructed a spreadsheet based index for the notebooks organising entries in themed columns which allows for cross-referencing and for electronic searches using names and terms. I chose to use notebooks when moving around the city over writing straight to computer as they are tough, light and flexible, do not run out of battery power and are less susceptible to heat, dust and sudden downpours.

Along with my notebooks I always carried a camera and a sound recorder. Recorded material includes 55 interviews with people including activists from across the social spectrum of the transparency and accountability scene, journalists, government officials and NGO workers, and many hours of field recordings of activist meetings, events and conferences. Where interviews and field recordings have not been transcribed in full

summaries of the content have been made that allow data to be located and part transcriptions developed. All recorded material in Hindi has been transcribed and translated. I have a large number of photographic records of spaces in the city, meetings and documents and a collection of short film clips from meetings and other events that I attended. There are also a large number of published and grey materials from activist groups including promotional leaflets, documents and paperwork used at meetings and campaigns. This material also includes audio-visual sources such as films and audio discs produced by activist groups, NGOs and TV news channels. I also collected relevant local and national news clippings and magazine articles throughout my fieldwork, resulting in four large scrapbooks. Finally there are internet based resources. Activist message boards offer a searchable archive of posts relating to events while I was in the field. Often posts have been made by activists familiar to me from Delhi. Posts of special interest have been forwarded to a dedicated email account providing a searchable resource accessible online. A large amount of activist produced content featuring personalities from my field is available on web 2.0 sites such as YouTube or Google Video and I have drawn on these sources in chapters 5 and 7.

In most cases I have changed the names of my informants and anonymised activist groups. In some cases, where activists or people associated with the transparency and accountability scene have become particularly well known, are published authors in their own right, or are peripheral to my research I have named them. I accept that sometimes my informants may be able to identify themselves and others from my descriptions of events, but I have tried to ensure that they would not be identifiable to readers from outside the relatively small activist scene. Where a group such as *Parivartan* or the *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS), and leading figures from those groups, have become particularly well known for their work or have been the subject of other research such that anonymity is a pointless exercise I have used real names.

Having developed a picture of Delhi as a divided social space and a field site, next I turn to the framing of state and society through narratives of corruption, transparency and accountability in popular discourse and public culture during my field work.

Chapter 4: Framing Corruption, Transparency and Accountability in Delhi 2006-7.

While planning an outline for this chapter I discussed it with one of my key informants from Delhi. We had started by talking about discourses of corruption and she asked if I was going to ‘disaggregate’ different types of corruption, for example by differentiating between political and bureaucratic. I answered that I had not planned to do this and am much more interested in how people *talk* about corruption, transparency, accountability, and encounters with the state. I wish, as Akhil Gupta proposes, ‘to take seriously, that is, as a social fact, the hold that corruption has on the popular imagination’ in India (2005, 173).

In chapters 2 and 3 I outlined Delhi as a social and physical space and the ways in which my research intersected with and was affected by the city. In this chapter, to further prepare the ground for what follows, I want to develop a more general feeling for the discourses of corruption, transparency and accountability circulating in Delhi during the period of my fieldwork, and address three significant questions: How do people imagine the state by talking about corruption, transparency and accountability? How does public culture contribute to this imagination? And following from this, how does public culture contribute to the organisation and practice of transparency and accountability activism?

I will begin the chapter by picking some voices out of the susurrus of the city. These voices, drawn from conversations, field notes, recordings and internet sources, begin to show how people imagine the state to be; how they understand that individual bureaucratic encounters must often be negotiated at a personal and private level; and what actions they consider legitimate under the conditions existing in the city. These are personal narratives, told to me to describe life in the city, to outline strategies and aspirations, or to explain unfortunate events. They are not confidential, but they are told informally, rather than being presented or published by the narrators for public consumption.

Then, to contrast with these scraps of narrative, I will move on to engage with narratives of corruption and transparency within ‘public culture’ (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995). For Appadurai and Breckenridge public culture is the zone of cultural debate in which the tensions and contradictions between national sites and transnational cultural processes are contested (1995, 5). It is a space in which the state and social and cultural entrepreneurs produce messages for the consumption of a general public dominated by a theme of;

“‘Nationalist Realism’, that is, an array of images, symbols, scripts, and plots in which the nation is figured as central to the project of modernity’ (1995, 9)

In public culture normative moral concepts of appropriate behaviour relating to the nation, against which corrupt actions might be measured, are introduced. Characters such as the upright and disinterested official who gains office through merit, and his counterpart, the unprofessional officer who has gained office through family or political connections, become important, even though as individuals, as ideal types, they are figments of a ‘modernist imagination’ (Gupta 2005, 175). Public culture provides a site through which local, national and transnational concepts of modernity meet, intermingle and are reproduced, and to which private and personal narratives can relate. While it is true that some elements of public culture work through exclusion, access to some of the means through which it is transmitted may apply differentially, and it may not relate to some people’s experience (Pinney 2001, 9) public culture remains a zone through which people access ‘a common language of cultural agency’ (2001, 9) that draws on shared sets of references and understandings. To explore this zone in the latter sections of the chapter I introduce accounts from print, tele-visual media and journalist informants. I then move on to focus on two hit movies from 2006 that played an important role in articulating a message about civil society activism and the state of the nation.

So to reiterate, my aim in this chapter is to introduce Delhi as a space filled with discourses that partly structure the actions of my informants. Just like everybody else in Delhi transparency and accountability activists swim within and with the currents of

everyday talk about governance, politics and power that wash through the streets of the city. Contemporary and historical discourses about the relationship between individual citizens and the state; morality and social service; and modernity and the nation all play a role in the way that my informants structure the practice of their daily lives. Further to this, by focusing on personal and public accounts of corruption and transparency I hope to show how important a sense of connection is to the people that I encountered in Delhi. Connection is an ambivalent concept that can as easily be read positively in terms of ‘network’ as it can negatively as “nexus”, that is as the informal links that facilitate crony capitalism and illegitimate forms of power³¹. Connections *are* essential to social life, and as much to the social life and strategies of transparency and accountability activists as to any other group. This remains the case even though the idea of connections and influence carries a special resonance for these people, sensitive as they are to the limits of transparency and accountability as personal, moral and organisational qualities; limits that exist in the same fuzzy space as the boundaries between the public and the private.

The Knowing Story: Personal Narratives of Corruption, Connection and Encounters with the State.

In the summer of 2006 I had gone to Mussoorie, a resort town in the foothills of the Himalaya, to visit a friend from Delhi who was staying there to escape the heat and humidity of the city. Ranjit Singh is in his mid-sixties and recently returned to India with his US born son after 25 years living on the east coast of the US. He is from an elite background, a member of a former princely family from western India, and connected by marriage to a north Indian political dynasty that act as influential power brokers in state elections. We were sitting drinking tea in the garden of Ranjit’s sister’s house in an elite hilltop suburb. Ranjit was telling me how he and his son Sanjit’s

³¹ This distinction was used by my Anglophone informants. For example in an interview with one informant about funding in the Right to Information scene she repeatedly used the term network to refer to connections that helped to facilitate her projects, but when she referred to networks from which she felt excluded she referred to them as a ‘nexus’ (interview July 2010)

Indian driver's licenses had been processed when they had first arrived in India. The paperwork had been submitted but the licenses had not materialised quickly enough. Ranjit had mentioned this inconvenience in a conversation at his Delhi club and an acquaintance with a very high position in the bureaucracy had, out of politeness, made a phone call and sent a peon to ensure that the licenses were processed that day. For Ranjit the logic of this process was clear. He needed to get some petty bureaucratic work done and his friend, out of kindness, had simply done what was within his power to help, a useful reaffirmation of Ranjit's status and connections at the club, but also of his practical idea of how the bureaucracy functions. To explain his perception of the bureaucracy further he picked up a flat stone and slapped it onto the low table in front of us. Pointing at the stone he said

‘a businessman friend of mine tells me that to get a file moved you have to pay. You can wait, pray to god, go to temple, nothing will move that file until you pay what is asked. And if you pay then your work will be done’ (field notes 20th August 2006)

As he finished he moved the stone in a series of steps along the table, and then decisively flicked it back onto the ground.

Ranjit's perception of bureaucratic corruption is not uncommon, even if his point of view as an individual from an elite background, his ‘sighting of the state’ (Corbridge et al. 2005, 7), is. In fact his story about sorting out his driving license counters his own assertion that getting bureaucratic work done is a matter of a simple monetary transaction, but this is not a contradiction that concerns him. Ranjit is outlining a general idea of the practical reality of dealing with state agencies. If he is able to deal with the bureaucratic encounter necessary to obtain his driving license without recourse to the dirty business of bribery, or even visiting an office, then this is surely a measure of his status, a useful way of framing his own position and explaining to a foreigner how India functions. For Ranjit bribery is a phenomenon to be regretted but, like the summer heat on the plains, something which is natural and more easily avoided by those with the means to do so. Staying with his theme, and to further illustrate the

embeddedness of the practices of corruption, he then told me an apocryphal story about the former Prime minister and social activist Moraji Desai.

Desai was known for his moral authority and devotion to the freedom struggle. He was chosen as Prime Minister after Indira Gandhi lost the election that marked the end of the period of emergency rule from 1977-79. In Ranjit's story Desai opens offices around the country for people who want to make complaints about corruption. But the offices quickly become so popular that the police begin taking bribes to allow people to jump the queue and the idea has to be abandoned. Ranjit took a wry pleasure in the pointlessness of Desai's attempt to go against the natural order of things (fieldnotes, 20th August 2006).

The city is full of stories like these. A casual in transit conversation about his livelihood with an auto-rickshaw driver can produce a diatribe against 'corruption', full of complaints that it is everywhere and that this is ok for the rich (*bare log* – lit. Big People) who can afford it. But he asks, how can an ordinary man (*aam admi*) like him who clears 4-5000 rupees at the end of the month afford to pay bribes for paperwork? He might add that politicians are all thieves (*sab chor*), but also that he votes for the BJP when the elections come (field notes, 24th August 2007).

Some dream of being a bribe taker. In a hotel in the Pahar Ganj neighbourhood the young Muslim *chaiwala* (teaboy) tells me, in English learned from speaking to international tourists, about his attempt to join the Delhi police. He is going for the physical at the end of the month. After that he must take a written exam and show his '12th pass certificate' from high school and he may get in. 'When I am in Delhi Police I will have power!' he says smiling at me and clenching his fist. He adds that the job pays Rs.8000 a month but the collection of *hafta* (lit: week/weekly), the payments made by those in the informal sector such as street hawkers, to government officials to overlook their unauthorised presence and avoid prosecution (Chaturvedi 2006, 100), will supplement this. He adds that if he gets the job then perhaps he would be able to marry next year. I ask him if he would have to pay a bribe (*risvat dena*) to get the position as I had heard that posts in the police were auctioned off. He says that he has some land in

his village in Uttar Pradesh that he can sell to raise money, and will buy more land once he has secured the job (field notes, 15th May 2006).

Sometimes even activists have to give in to a request for a bribe. Sitting in the air conditioned office of a south Delhi based NGO Sheila tells me that even she has been forced to pay *chai-pani*³² to the police in order to get her passport approved in time for her to leave the country for an international anti-corruption conference. As part of the passport application process the police can make a home visit to check that the applicant actually lives at the address and is bona fide. They often require that a small amount of money is given, a gratuity for their trouble. ‘What could I do?’ Sheila asks, ‘I needed to get my passport’ (from field notes, 29th May 2006)

All over the city the effects of bureaucratic corruption and private influence are made concrete in the form of unauthorised buildings; although their illegal status does not guarantee that they will survive a vigilance drive. At INA Market in South Delhi the owner of a temporary looking dried fruit stall tells me that he has had a shop there for ten years but that it was smashed in the latest demolition drive by the MCD. He said that he had originally paid off the MCD in order to build the shop, and given regular payments to the police to allow the shop to stay. But the demolition drive has swept away these arrangements and the shop has gone. Now he has been allowed to put up a wooden shed but told that he must not add a permanent roof to it. (From field notes, May 18th 2006)

Even those attempting to do good works are not spared. During a break in a lesson my Hindi Tutor relates a story about going with some American friends to a ministry in Delhi to assist them in getting their Varanasi based NGO registered to allow it to receive overseas funding. They spent over an hour in an office talking to an official about America, drinking tea and eating biscuits but not actually getting to the point of the interview. Finally the official asked outright for 30,000 Rupees to register the NGO, but was bargained down to 25,000. Disgusted with this my tutor tells me;

³² *Chai-Pani* translates literally as tea-water but idiomatically means a small amount of money given out of politeness to officials who have performed a service. The boundary between gratuity and bribe are blurred even though both parties may be well aware that giving a gratuity is against the rules.

‘I myself had given 2000 Rupees to the NGO and that officer would take the money and go to Benares on holiday, take a dip in the *Ganga* and pray, and all on money that was meant for the poor!’ (from field notes, 17th February 2006)

Foreigners from places that score favourably in popular indexes that assess national propensities for corruption³³ quickly adjust to what they perceive to be an “Indian” situation. On internet message boards for expatriate business and development workers in the city recommendations are posted for agents or ‘contacts’ that can help with bureaucratic problems,

‘I’d like to recommend Amit as an agent to help at the FRRO³⁴. I am sure some of you have used some of these agents already to help with the process. The kids and I were there for 5min just to verify our presence! My husband was there an extra 20min. It was great given that the last time it took me 6 hours. He returned all our passports to us that night all extended. No fuss, no hassles. *All legitimate.*’ (from an internet forum for expatriate professionals - Delhi 15th December 2008, my italics)

or to tell stories about trouble and delays;

‘the file was still travelling somewhere in the MHA³⁵, and instead of getting the visa for 9 months, I got it only for 2 months (and that is also after paying some cash to someone at the MHA), until the review of the file will be over. I assure you that there was nothing wrong with the file, just got lost in the endless Indian bureaucracy. Another important thing, is that as a foreigner, you can never settle things with these officials by cash, you always need a local guy who’ll give them the money. If you work with a good agency, they take care that the file travels to the right places, you don’t need to spend your day [...] In worst case, having a local guy can help in ‘smoothing’ things. I also think that your company should be happy to provide you such service, rather than pay for 2-3 days that you need to invest in this process.’ (from an internet forum for expatriate professionals - Delhi 24th January 2007)

³³ For example see the yearly Corruption Perceptions Index produced by Transparency International at <http://www.transparency.org/>

³⁴ Foreigners Regional Registration Office

³⁵ Ministry of Home Affairs

Back on the street in south Delhi Sachin, the friend and informant who runs a small toy shop in a busy market area next to one of Delhi's main arterial roads, asks me how much it costs to bribe a traffic policeman in the UK for a minor offence. I tell him that I have no idea, adding that anyway I wouldn't try to as it would probably make things worse. Sachin stares at me in incomprehension and asks, 'the police don't take money?', 'well...no, not just like that' I reply, 'why not?' he says, and I do not have a convincing answer to offer him (Field notes, April 6th 2007).

And on a hot evening in east Delhi the usefulness of connections in the government to even the most committed of transparency and accountability activists is made clear to me as I am walking to the bus stop with an activist friend after cooking dinner together at his house. He has been telling me about his plans for the NGO that he has started and how he has avoided trying to get funding for it so far as he does not want to be steered in his work by the demands of donors. But now he feels the group is gaining enough identity of its own to start looking for sources of funding, perhaps even from foreign donors. I mention the possibility of bribes being demanded to get the necessary registration but he is not concerned about this. It is against his principles to pay a bribe and anyway he says that he has good contacts high up in the home ministry and that he could get his work done through them. He adds with a wry smile that the contact at the home ministry had even offered to slow down the applications of potential rivals if requested (field notes, May 3rd 2007)

In these voices we come across what Shiv Visvanathan calls the 'first literacy of a city' (2008), the necessity of connection in order to manage life. Connections that relate to knowledge, information, and to transparency;

'A city is a knowledge economy and many of its knowledges are not open. They are tacit, monopolized, secret, changing and manipulative. To enter modernity, development, urbanization, you need to know three things. First, that they are forms of knowledge; rule games. Second, to play these games you need access, entry, membership, which too are forms of knowledge. Third, a city is a classification; it's

full of lethal dualisms like formal and informal, white economy-black economy, official and unofficial. Success is an art of being on the right side of these.’
(Visvanathan 2008)

As we can see from the stories above connection and the ability to negotiate is understood by my informants to be the key to this success, and even those who are actively attempting to change the relationship between members of the public and state representatives are well aware of the practicalities of dealing with the state. The post colonial legacy of an ‘omnipresent’ state in India (Kaviraj 1990, 11) endures despite liberalisation and the privatization of some of its functions, and encounters with its agents and offices remain a necessary feature of daily life for many (Corbridge et al. 2005; Veron et al. 2003). At this personal level people might be more disposed to negotiate with the representatives of the state that they encounter, and may weigh the blurring of ideal moral boundaries against the alternative of facing a difficult time or lengthy delays.

When asking the question ‘how do people talk about the state?’ we can see that corruption and connections are as much topics of interest for people in Delhi in 2006-7 as they have been described in ethnographic studies from other parts of India (Ruud 2000a, 2000b; Gupta 1995, 2005; Parry 2000), and that the personalization and informality of the ‘everyday state’ (Fuller and Benei 2000) is a significant factor that people must take into account. This leads me to my next question; if this is how people talk about the state in *informal* spaces then what contribution does *public* culture make to the way that people perceive the state and the development of the nation?

Corruption Stories as Commodities: Stings and the City.



With video tapes, websites and so on, bribe-taking is going to be quite risky unlike our times.

(From *The Best of Laxman: The Common Man Tackles Corruption*. (Laxman 2002, 5))

Any good bookshop in Delhi will have a shelf of titles that bemoan the state of the nation and its bureaucracy, often written by retired civil servants. Titles such as: ‘The Pathology of Corruption’ (Gill 1998); ‘Corruption: Roadblock to National Prosperity’ (Vittal 2003); or ‘Public Office, Private Interest’ (Das 2001) offer explanations for the moral decline of the nation, even in the face of unprecedented growth and prosperity, and suggest schemes for moral regeneration and systemic change. Newspapers follow major stories from the city always with an eye open for *hera-pheri* (dodgy dealings). Corruption and a lack of transparency are presented as explanatory schemes for

understanding why the city is how it is. Why are there so many unauthorised buildings in the city? Because MCD engineers have been bribed to turn a blind eye to their construction. Why are the Blue-line busses in the city involved in so many accidents? Because their rich and influential owners pay off the police and government inspectors to ignore the flouting of safety regulations and speed limits. Why are the streets not cleaned? Because the MCD sweepers are paying off their bosses to allow them to moonlight at other jobs³⁶.

Everyday complaints about bureaucracy and tales of corruption from the street are reproduced in the work of popular entertainers such as Jaspal Bhatti (Gupta 2005, 173) through the experiences of the 'Common Man' drawn over 50 years in the times of India by cartoonist R.K Laxman (Chatterjee 2007, 303), or more recently in successful TV comedy series such as 'Office Office' (SAB TV) which takes dysfunctional bureaucratic encounters as its central premise. In Office Office the middle class male protagonist tries to get some essential work done, paying a bill, changing a name on an ownership certificate, dealing with the police. His attempts are frustrated at each turn by red tape administered by corrupt or lazy bureaucrats, but he keeps on trying to find his way through, carrying his paperwork from desk to desk and carefully negotiating each new personal encounter.

A show such as Office Office, like Laxman's Common Man cartoons, could have been set in any decade since Independence. The theme of the bewilderment of an everyman figure in the face of an indigenously administered bureaucracy critiques the post-colonial development of the nation and has an almost universal appeal in that respect. But more definitively modern, and playing in counterpoint to the glossy production values of the TV sitcom, is the dark and grainy hidden camera footage of the TV news 'sting' operation.

For Aniruddha Bahal, the journalist, novelist and pioneer of 'sting' operations in the Indian news media;

³⁶ I have not carried out a statistical survey of the prevalence of these stories, rather these give a flavour of coverage by the English language press, daily newspapers, weekly and monthly news magazines that I collected into scrapbooks between January 2006 and October 2007.

‘[Corruption] is part of the national dialogue more as a source of entertainment than as a source of outrage. People may say “ohhh this guy has done this and that” but it’s not as if people are outraged by it... the moment the bulk of the population develops a cynical attitude towards corruption, a “what can happen? What can we do?” Sort of thing, then it is very dangerous for the society. A society without any lack of outrage towards this, there must be something seriously wrong with that society’ (interview, 16th April 2007)

Bahal’s suggestion that Indians take a neutral view of corruption works better as a justification for his own work than as a general statement on Indian society or morals. But, he is certainly correct that corruption stories are a popular form of entertainment. He is in a good position to know having successfully taken an entrepreneurial approach to organising and producing some of India’s most recent and notorious corruption scandals.

The sting is an important part of a new paradigm for the rolling news networks in Delhi. Captured by micro technology small samples of the everyday practices of the city are abstracted through the medium of television and folded back in to people’s understandings of how the city, and the nation, functions. A brief outline of Bahal’s career will serve to introduce the rise of the sting operation in India.

In his efforts to provoke a sense of outrage Bahal has worked on stories that expose corruption at the heart of the Indian establishment. He began his career at the news magazine Outlook before joining the team that started the website Tehelka.com. With Tehelka Bahal was involved in organising the sting operation ‘Fallen Heroes’ in 1999 which exposed match fixing in Indian cricket. In 2000 Tehelka targeted the Defence Ministry in ‘Operation West End’. Bahal and his colleague Matthew Samuel posed as military hardware salesmen and caught a number of government and military officials on camera accepting bribes to arrange contracts. In late 2005, having left Tehelka to start the news website ‘Cobrapost’, Bahal and a female undercover reporter, Suhasini Raj, carried out ‘Operation Duryodhana’ in which 11 MPs were filmed accepting bribes to ask questions in Parliament (Rao 2008, 203). All three stings succeeded in causing a sensation, but in the case of Operation West End it was the BJP government of the time

that was most outraged by the sting. It launched a commission of enquiry into the matter that led to raids on the Tehelka office, the arrest of its financier and to the virtual closure of the website (Chaudhury 2006, 13; Zaitchik 2006). In 2006 the furore over the 'Cash for Queries' sting was still going on as I started my fieldwork. This time however the mood in government was different and the 11 MPs involved were suspended from parliament.

The availability of technology and the success of these large scale, long term, operations has led to a proliferation of much smaller scale imitations, and the development of a sting industry. Cobrapost now acts as a 'TV production company' (Anirudda Bahal, Interview, 16th April 2007) that carries out undercover investigations and then packages them for the news stations, particularly for the Rupert Murdoch owned Star News network. Other channels such as NDTV have developed their own departments for undercover reporting preferring to keep these activities in house and retain editorial control. As Thussu notes, this type of reporting focuses closely on news from metropolitan areas and largely on 'exposing bureaucratic mismanagement and corruption in public sector units and small private enterprises, but rarely, if ever, the large corporate groups' (2007, 603).

A city such as Delhi, overflowing with irregularities and informal arrangements provides a rich field of possibilities for journalists with hidden cameras. The televised sting allows a myriad of small events in the city to be abstracted and recontextualised, placed in the public sphere to be viewed against legal and constitutional norms. Take two stories from the NDTV channel provided for me by Siddarth, an investigative reporter on the channel's corruption beat. The stories focus on the education system. In the first film a hidden camera shows the principle of a government funded school sitting at his desk surrounded by a large number of angry parents. The parents are demanding the end of year report cards for their children that will allow them to progress. The Headmaster is holding back cards belonging to children whose parents have failed to make a 'voluntary' donation to the schools 'building fund'. The second film shows students taking their 12th class (high school) maths exam. Their relatives, and private tutors hired for the afternoon, are waiting outside the window of the exam

room. The papers are passed outside to be completed by the families and tutors and then returned to the students as the exam invigilators stand by. In another section of the film a private tutor is filmed by a female reporter posing as a school teacher. He tells her that she can earn a great deal of money by joining a scheme in which she works with private tutors to ensure that certain of her students pass. The hidden camera footage is knitted together with commentary from Siddarth (from NDTV footage, undated).

Siddarth asserts that NDTV only bring in hidden cameras ‘as a last resort’ and that the use of stings is led by a clear cut editorial policy and not driven by ‘TRPs’ (Television Rating Points)³⁷. He adds that there is a danger of sensationalising stories and that the media should not be judge, jury and executioner, but that this type of media strategy has had a positive effect on transparency (from field notes, 16th April 2007). Aniruddha Bahal is dismissive of stings that target ordinary people, and of NDTV in particular;

‘they specialise in undercover stuff where nobody can get after them [...] that’s typical NDTV mentality and it’s like they will do some small undercover thing about cops taking money on the crossing if you jump a red light [...] they never have the vision or the courage to take on big people and high places.’ (Interview, 16th April 2007).

However, like Siddarth he asserts that the work is about improving transparency and the development of the nation;

‘I mean that’s what transparency means to me. If information is not easily available then journalists go and ferret it out. And sometimes what you ferret out it is of embarrassment to authority of various kinds. So, it’s a big scoop, an exposure, if it embarrasses the sitting authority of the day into acknowledging any act of omission or commission on their part... This whole anti-corruption thing is very important. It is very important in any developing society [...] for the simple reason that your resources have to go in the right direction. And if your resources don’t go in the right direction, then it hampers your economic development, it hampers the whole growth of the economy, it creates less jobs, it creates overall gloom in that sense....by doing these

³⁷ The system which rates the size of audiences for particular programmes.

stories you can highlight what has happened and what is going wrong, you kind of hope, in the larger perspective it would help in resources going in the right direction. (interview, 16th April 2007)

Both Siddarth and Aniruddha Bahal justify stings large and small as part of a notional universal human right to information and as, what Mazzarella calls, a ‘necessary component of socio-economic progress’ (2006, 475-476), and present themselves as agents of that progress. They are reproducing a perennial discourse about corruption and development that might be found in Gunnar Myrdal’s 40 year old idea of the ‘soft state’, in which planned development, the direction of resources, is limited or eroded by corruption (1968, 2:952) as well as in more recent documents from donor organisations on governance and anti-corruption (World Bank 2007).

In an entertaining interview about the nuts and bolts of Operation Duryodhana Suhasini Raj, the undercover reporter, provided a slightly less worthy account, talking about the personal pleasure she got from ‘getting the bastards’ (interview 11th April 2007). However, an altogether more jaundiced view of the sting phenomenon was offered to me by Sandeep a journalist low down in the Tehelka newsroom. He suggested that the focus of most stings, particularly at the smaller scale, is the story, not anti-corruption, transparency or accountability. He added; ‘if anybody in the sting business says that they are doing it in the name of truth and justice then they are lying’. For Sandeep the sting is the point of the story; it is a complete event in itself and is not necessarily about changing things. As Suhasini described, undercover journalism is exciting both for the reporter and the viewer, but for Sandeep it is ultimately no more truthful than other forms of journalism. He pointed out that the grainy footage, strange angles and distorted sound that the undercover equipment provides only serves to cast those it is directed at as villains. The hidden camera sting becomes a journalistic trope from which viewers expect certain things, and anyway deals with that which people already know (fieldnotes, 29th March 2007).

We can see how accounts of corruption and the bureaucracy in the news media might contribute to ‘the “folklore of corruption”, i.e., people’s beliefs about corruption and the

emotions attached to those beliefs, as disclosed in public debate and in gossip' (Myrdal 1968, 2:940) and that they do this by referring to events in specific localities, and to a sense of 'nationalist realism' (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995, 9). The rise of sting operations in particular, that target the higher levels of state as well as officials in ordinary local offices, creates a persuasive mixture that links micro and locally situated actions, to a macro level sense of national malaise. If the media acts as a mirror for society, albeit one distorted by the interests of newspaper and TV channel owners who must survive commercially (Thussu 2007), then what it reflects is an idea of structure, a culture of corruption perhaps, but also a potential for agency, for positive action towards change. After all India suffers from no shortage of moral leadership, or public commitment to social service, either now or in the past. Which leads me to address my next question; how does public culture contribute to the organisation and practice of transparency and accountability activism?

Revisiting the Freedom Struggle: The Rang De Basanti Spirit, Gandhigiri and Citizen Activism.

Film songs are ubiquitous on the streets of Delhi, pouring from the speakers of radios in barber shops, at fruit juice and paan stalls, and easing crowded bus rides. The songs of the hit films of the time are played in heavy rotation on the city's many FM music stations until they become completely familiar. In 2006 many of the songs heard around the city were from two films that presented themes and characters from India's freedom struggle. Their stories were heavy with the suggestion that the nation had lost its way but could be redeemed by moral transformation at both the personal and national levels. *Rang De Basanti* (Paint it Saffron), released on January 26th 2006, Republic Day in India, was very successful, particularly in Mumbai and Delhi, although less so in the south of the country. The film won a number of awards within India and was also put forward as India's entry into the best foreign film category at the 2007 Oscars. *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (Carry on Munna Bhai) released in September 2006 was also hugely

successful. The film has *satyagraha* (the Gandhian method of non-violent protest) as a central theme. I will begin with *Rang De Basanti*.

Rang De Basanti follows Sue Mckinley, young British filmmaker as she travels to India to direct a film about a group of iconic revolutionaries from India's freedom movement. Sue arrives in Delhi and is met by her friend Sonia who introduces her to her gang of middle class male friends from university. Daljit, also known as DJ, is from a Punjabi Sikh family but not outwardly religious. Karan is from an elite background, his father a rich businessman with political connections. Aslam comes from a traditional Muslim family living in the narrow lanes of old Delhi. The background of Sukhi, Daljit's comedy sidekick and the baby of the group, is never explained. Through spending time with the group Sue experiences a modern India in which young middle class people live carefree lives, driving around all night, drinking and refusing to take anything seriously. But as she discovers this is also an India in which Hindu nationalist groups act against those indulging in immoral westernised behaviour and where policemen can be bribed to overlook misdemeanours.

Unable to find suitable actors for her film Sue turns to the group and asks them to take the roles of the revolutionaries. The boys are cast; Daljit as Chandrashekar Azad; Karan as Bhagat Singh; Aslam as Ashfaqulla Khan; and Sukhi as Shivaram Rajguru. A process begins in which the young men learn something of the revolutionary freedom struggle that produced the nation through their reading of Sue's scripts for the film. However, they are slow to connect to the sentiments of the revolutionaries, seeing them as too serious and over dramatic. They are later joined by a fifth member Laxman, who Sue casts as Ram Prasad Bismil³⁸. Laxman is a fellow student and member of a militant wing of the governing Hindu nationalist party who had previously been antagonistic to the group because of their cross religious friendships, westernisation and lack of

³⁸ There is no space here to go into great detail about these important figures from India's freedom struggle. Chandrashekar Azad, Bhagat Singh, Ashfaqulla Khan, Shivaram Rajguru and Ram Prasad Bismil were socialist revolutionaries involved in violent struggle against the British all of whom were executed for their parts in different actions including the assassination of a British police officer in Lahore; the robbing of a payroll train at Kakori in Uttar Pradesh; and the throwing of bombs in the Central Assembly hall in New Delhi. All are iconic figures in India whose portraits can often be seen hung in restaurants and other public places. However outside India their story has been eclipsed to a great extent by the narrative of Gandhi's non-violent struggle against the British.

morals. But he has become disillusioned with the corruption and political machinations he finds in his party and takes on a role in the film believing that he can best express the feelings of a nationalist freedom fighter. After initial hostility he is accepted by the group.

In a pivotal scene the group, including Laxman, are celebrating the last night in town of Ajay, their old friend and fiancée of Sonia. Ajay is a pilot in the Indian Air Force and is about to leave for a tour of duty. The group are in a sombre mood having just watched a recently completed section of their film in which two of the revolutionaries are tortured and executed by the British. While they are drinking in a plush neon lit lounge bar a conversation starts in which the friends discuss the state of the country:

Ajay: 'Everyone has a passion inside them, they just have to find this 'thing'.'

Sue: 'yes, just like our revolutionaries. Their passion for freedom was greater than their love for their own lives'

Karan: (staring into his drink) 'there's nothing in this world worth giving your life for. Nothing!'

Daljit: (drunkenly) 'Correct!' (then calling to the barman for more alcohol) 'hey boss *ek bar* (lit:one time) repeat

Sonia remonstrates with him telling him to take it easy

Ajay: 'come on Karan, there are things worth giving your life for'

Karan: Please! Like what? Look at Bhagat Singh and Azad and the rest of those guys, they gave their lives for this country and look what happened, all for nothing. It's a shithole today...

Sonia: (angrily) 'I give a shit! People like Ajay who fight for their country give a shit, so that people like you can sleep peacefully'

Karan: 'Sonia, get real'

Sue: 'Sonia's right!'

Aslam: ‘Sue, it’s all fine for a foreigner like you to say all this... out here we’re all fighting for basics, food, clothing and shelter’

Karan: ‘out here you try to change things you’ll get even more screwed, corruption³⁹ is in our DNA, there is no future for this country’

Daljit: ‘She’s talking about the past, you’re thinking of the future... one leg in the past, one in the future, that’s why we’re pissing on the present’ (Daljit and Sukhi collapse laughing)

Sonia: ‘DJ shut up! For once in life get serious’

Ajay: ‘Karan, it’s easy to sit on the outside and be a critic, blaming others is even easier. Why don’t you go out there and change things? Take a stand, join politics, the police force, government, and clean it up. But you won’t! I’ll tell you why. Because that takes hard work, it’s easier to crib’ (meaning to complain)

Karan: (standing up angrily) ‘Nothing’s going to change, you can go to your grave trying and it won’t make any difference’

Daljit: ‘Correct! The only difference will be how you go to your grave

Again Sonia remonstrates with Daljit for being drunk and slurring he protests that he is not, then returning to his theme:

Daljit: where were we?

Sukhi: on the way to our graves

Daljit: ahh! On the way to our graves... we’ll all be wrapped in white shrouds when we die, only Ajay will be wrapped in the national flag. Karan you can say whatever you want, not even the street dogs will bark when we die, but Ajay will get a 21 one gun salute!’ Laughing the four men start to march around the room. Together they pick Ajay up and like pall bearers carry him

³⁹ Note that Karan uses the English word ‘corruption’ here instead of the Hindi “bhrashtachar”

around the room on their shoulders. (Original dialogue in Hindi, this text is reproduced from English subtitles to *Rang De Basanti*, (Mehra 2006))

This scene presages a dramatic turn in the film. On the TV news the crash of an Indian Air Force MIG 21 jet piloted by Ajay is reported. Ajay has been killed as he chose not to eject from the plane in order to steer away from a town. It seems that Ajay has died a hero's death and his funeral is an inversion of the scene in the bar in which his body draped in the Indian tricolour is carried to a funeral pyre, which is lit by Daljit.

The film then moves to the TV news reports of Ajay's death, highlighting a number of other MIG 21 crashes, a problem attributed to high level corruption in the government and the supply of substandard Russian parts to the military. In an interview the Defense minister claims that Ajay's death was a result of carelessness and brash behaviour, he adds that from now on the military will not allow irresponsible pilots such as Ajay to fly. A following scene shows the defence minister and Karan's father travelling in a car discussing the political effect of the story giving the audience the opportunity to imagine a nexus between politics, government and business interests, and a possible connection to Ajay's death.

The friends organise a peaceful candle lit vigil for Ajay at the India Gate war memorial. Hundreds of people attend and again reports from Delhi's rolling news TV stations, in particular NDTV, thread the narrative together. At the protest Ajay's mother holds the government and the defence minister in particular, responsible for Ajay's death. The defence minister, watching on TV, sends riot police to violently break up the demonstration. In the melee that follows Ajay's mother is badly injured, later slipping into a coma, further angering and radicalising the young men.

The latter part of the film becomes increasingly melodramatic and it is only necessary to sketch it out briefly for our purposes here. The film makes an explicit connection between the police and government organised violence at the candle lit vigil and the Jallianwalabagh massacre of 1919 in which British forces led by Brigadier General

Dyer fired on a peaceful gathering in Amritsar⁴⁰. By doing so the film suggests that the power relationship between governors and governed in contemporary India is one of exploitation and violent domination. Interweaving dialogue and scenes in which the friends appear as themselves, and as the revolutionaries they have been portraying, they plan and carry out the assassination of the defence minister. In the uproar that follows, again mediated through television news channels, in particular NDTV, the friends realise that the minister is being feted as a national hero and the victim of terrorists. As part of the media scrutiny of events it is also revealed that Karan's father is implicated in the supply of faulty parts for the MIG 21 jets. Karan takes the gun that was used to kill the defence minister and kills his father. In the final scenes the friends take over a studio at All India Radio (AIR) at gunpoint and broadcasting to the nation confess to the murder of the minister saying that they are only students, not terrorists or associated with any political party. People start calling in from all over the country and Karan speaks to them on air as army commandos arrive outside with orders to leave no survivors.

As the commandos attack the friends are killed one by one with the event covered as rolling news by NDTV. Finally soldiers burst into the studio and kill both Daljit and Karan while they are still speaking on the radio.

The final scene shows Sue, Sonia and the parents of the friends in their grief, and then turns to a series of TV news vox pops in which young people on the streets of Delhi protest at the unfairness of the killing saying; 'this will swell like a wave and will bring an end to corruption'; 'if we want to shake the entire population out of their slumber then we need an explosion like this'; 'when we grow out of this we will be a nation that is beautiful and free of corruption' (all quotes taken from the English subtitles to *Rang De Basanti*, (Mehra 2006).

⁴⁰ Jallianwalabagh provided a catalyst for the the non-cooperation movement led by M.K.Gandhi, but also inspired revolutionaries such as Bhagat Singh and Chadrashakar Azad in their actions. A revenge assassination of the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab at the time of the massacre, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, was carried out in London in 1940 by Udham Singh. He was hung for the murder and later declared a *shaheed* (martyr) by Jawarhalal Nehru.

Rang De Basanti's narrative of a nation threatened by a corrupt nexus between government, business and politics is not particularly new. As Christopher Pinney points out a 'sense of a state that is not adequate to the needs of its nation is a recurrent trope in recent Indian public culture' (2001, 29) not least in Hindi cinema, as is the trope of an Indian modernity 'gone sour' (2001, 29). Neither does *Rang De Basanti* contradict ideal behaviours that might be found within the moral universe of the Hindi film (Thomas 1995, 165). The male friends remain faithful to each other and show respect to their families, overcoming selfish desires and showing that they have the essential qualities of the hero, 'heart' that is emotional bonds and generosity of spirit, and 'principles'. As Rosie Thomas notes, the highest accolade for a hero is that they should have;

'both heart and principles and that the latter - respect for and duty to the community - is placed above duty that is linked (contaminated) with emotion (feelings for kin and peers) (1995, 165-166 parentheses in original).

Thus even Karan's killing of his father, done on principle to protect the nation from corruption, is morally allowable.

But if *Rang De Basanti* did not challenge the conventions of Hindi cinema its use of the contemporary media culture of Delhi to knit the narrative together, presenting an image of citizen and civil society activism mediated through technology, did have a powerful effect. 24 hour rolling news channels are very familiar to people in Delhi, if not through watching TV, then through the presence of outside broadcast trucks moving around the city to cover the latest story, giving a sense of immediacy and shared involvement in events. An involvement based on a shared imagination that has the potential to move to collective action (Appadurai 1996, 8).

In Delhi in 2006 this potential was most obviously manifested in a series of protests, including *Rang De Basanti* inspired candle lit vigils at India Gate, over the February 2006 acquittal of the accused in the sensational case of the murder of Jessical Lal. Lal was a model and actress, shot dead in front of a large number of witnesses at a party at an expensive restaurant in the south of the city. The man accused of her murder, Manu

Sharma, was the son of a leading Congress Party minister in the government of Haryana. The acquittal came after a seven year court case during which witnesses were bribed to withhold evidence⁴¹. A decision to appeal the acquittal was attributed to the pressure applied by middle class ‘civil society’ through protests, candle light vigils, and an SMS message campaign organised by the NDTV news channel. In December 2006 the acquittal was overturned and Manu Sharma found guilty of the murder. Media pressure also led to the fast tracking of another appeal against the acquittal of Santosh Singh in the 1996 murder of Priyadarshini Mattoo, a Delhi law student. In this case Singh was the son of a police commissioner in Delhi. At the appeal Singh was found guilty and sentenced to death in October 2006. Again *Rang De Basanti* style candle light vigils held at India gate played a part in media led protest campaigns involving middle class youths⁴².

⁴¹ Details can be found in the Tehelka story ‘Killers of Justice’ (Khare and Baweja 2006) at http://www.tehelka.com/story_main20.asp?filename=Ne100706killers_of_CS.asp accessed 18th May 2010

⁴² Middle class newspaper reports at the time covered the vigils linking citizens’ action directly to the outcome of the cases. See Nobody is Born Evil. *Times of India*, October 24, New Delhi edition. <http://www.articlearchives.com/crime-law/criminal-offenses-conspiracy/1775897-1.html>. (Dasgupta 2006) and Seeking Justice in Priyadarshini Murder Case. *The Hindu*, July 24, New Delhi edition. <http://www.thehindu.com/2006/07/24/stories/2006072413180100.htm>. (The Hindu 2006)



(December 2006: While cycling through a colony in south Delhi I came across this scene completely by accident. I stopped to ask what was happening and was told that this was the sister of Jessica Lal giving her reaction to the Manu Sharma verdict to TV news cameras. Photograph: Martin Webb)

Some commentators were sceptical about this apparent mobilisation of the urban middle classes. It has been noted how the film addressed urban middle class audiences in the larger cities, particularly in Delhi, rather than smaller towns and rural areas (Raghavendra 2006, 1505), that ‘non-elite’ audiences outside of the larger cities were much less able to connect to the lifestyles of the film’s protagonists (Rao 2007, 60), and that the protests were limited in scope as they were organised through middle class mediums such as the television and did not call for greater accountability of those involved in prosecuting the cases, but rather only for posthumous justice (Singhvi 2006). However, what is not in doubt is the effect that the film had on the repertoire of middle class protest in Delhi. The action around these sensational murder cases was

facilitated by, and provided perfect stories for, the metropolitan media. This coupled with the popularity of *Rang De Basanti*'s patriotic narrative of radicalised middle class youth, prompted a more general interest in activism. The film's message was useful for my activist informants who at the time were focused on recruiting volunteers for campaigns in Delhi. It articulated a potential political engagement for middle class people beyond politics based on struggles over urban space and caste (Fernandes 2006, 144-145, 178; Corbridge and Harriss 2003, 125; Baviskar 2003, 2007). My activist informants commented on the way that the film affected the willingness of people, particularly young students from Delhi University to volunteer. (field notes 23rd November 2006). This was borne out by the enthusiasm for the film of young student volunteers at a Right to Information camp I attended in the summer of 2006 (see chapter 5). They excitedly asked if I had seen the film, and told me that they had been to see it multiple times (field notes, July 2nd 2006). Candle lit vigils became a familiar part of the repertoire at protest events with informants identifying them specifically as a post *Rang De Basanti* phenomena, and associating them with western styles of public commemoration for events such as the September 11th attacks in America, (fieldnotes, 29th March 2007).

If *Rang De Basanti* draws on an edgy youthfulness in its message about national renewal then *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (Carry on Munna Bhai), a romantic comedy, presents a different, and more family friendly face. Munna, played by Sanjay Dutt, is a Mumbai *goonda* (gangster/hoodlum), a man used to bending the rules. He and his sidekick Circuit work for a crooked property developer called Lucky Singh who specialises in obtaining property by force, or by coercing and bribing officials. Munna has fallen in love with the voice of a Mumbai radio host called Jhanvi. He listens to her every morning and hears that on October 2nd, the birthday of M.K. Gandhi, she will be hosting a quiz about the life of the Mahatma. The winner will get to meet Jhanvi in person. The only things that Munna and Circuit know about Gandhi is that his face is on Indian bank notes, and that he helped to get the British to leave India. To solve this problem Circuit kidnaps some professors from the university and they are ready to enter the phone in competition, which Munna wins. During his on air meeting with Jhanvi at

the radio station Munna claims to be a history professor to impress her. She tells him that she lives in a large house called ‘2nd Innings’ with her grandfather and some of his elderly friends, whose families no longer have room for them, and asks Munna to come to the house the next Sunday to give a talk about Gandhi. Realising that there is no way that he can cheat in this situation Munna hides away for five days in the Mahatma Gandhi Museum and Library to learn as much as he can. The museum is an old building empty of people and the caretaker tells Munna that it is years since they had a visitor. Munna studies non-stop for three days, until one afternoon he is disturbed by a voice. He looks up from his book and standing before him is an apparition of Gandhi who offers to help him with his lecture at Jhanvi’s house. Gandhi says that whenever Munna thinks of him he will be there to help.

At 2nd Innings house Munna calls Gandhi to help him and asks the audience for questions. Jhanvi’s grandfather tells Munna that he saw a boy throwing stones at Gandhi’s statue, what should he have done? With Gandhi’s help Munna answers that he should have let the boy break the statue and adds that all the statues of Gandhi should be torn down, his picture taken down from the wall and his name removed from banknotes, buildings and roads. The old people are shocked by this but, through Munna, Gandhi tells them that he has been reduced to an image, and that people have lost a place for him in their hearts. Warming to this theme, and speaking for himself, Munna continues;

‘He’s done so much for us, been jailed, fasted, even took three bullets. And what have we done for him? Reduced him to a wall hanging, a mute witness to our corruption. He dreamt of a fantastic India, but we’ve ruined the country’

Jhanvi’s grandfather interjects; ‘No son, it’s not that bad. We have progressed’, but Munna jumps to his feet and shouts;

‘Progress my foot! We have taps but no water. Bulbs, but no electricity. Craters on roads, hawkers on sidewalks. Make a train reservation get wait-listed. Get a confirmation, the train is cancelled. Go to a hospital, no bed. Get a bed, no doctor. Who do you complain to? The politician sends you to the clerk, the clerk’s always in a

meeting. Call him at home, he's in the bath. Finally get through, he wants your application in duplicate. Then the application goes round and round and round... If Bapu (Gandhi) were around today, he'd say "we won our freedom, but we lost our people" (dialogue taken from the English subtitles to *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*, Hirani, 2006)

The old people and Jhanvi give him a round of applause and Munna realises that he is a success with Jhanvi. The only problem, as the apparition of Gandhi points out to him later, is that Jhanvi thinks that Munna is a professor, and if Munna is to be a Gandhian and live truthfully then he will have to admit his deceit. He does not manage to do this, and it becomes more difficult as his relationship with Jhanvi develops. He plans to ask her to marry him, and takes her and the old folks to Goa for a holiday. But while they are away, Lucky Singh, who has been trying to buy 2nd Innings house as a wedding present for his daughter, grabs the property.

Munna and Jhanvi decide to use '*Gandhigiri*' to fight back against Lucky Singh as the legal process will take years. *Gandhigiri* is Munna's way of expressing his understanding of the teachings of Gandhi. Approximately it means "doing things in the style of Gandhi" or "Gandhi...ing" and translates the tenets of Gandhianism, usually expressed through sanskritised and academic terms such as *satyagraha* (lit. truth-force, into contemporary Mumbai street slang. They will camp outside Lucky's house and send him flowers and a 'get well soon' card everyday, trying to change his mind with love rather than violence. Confused by their approach Lucky confronts the protesters; 'Why are you messing with me' he demands, 'I have the police, the power, the money, what do you have?'. Munna answers 'I have Bapu' (Gandhi) and Jhanvi adds 'and I have the radio dude!' (Hirani, 2006)

Jhanvi and Munna rename Jhanvi's radio show 'Mahatma's Magic' and ask people to phone in with their problems, to be solved by *Gandhigiri*. The show is a great success across the city and Munna and Jhanvi ask the listeners to keep sending Lucky Singh flowers in the hope that he will get well soon. People call in with all sorts of grievances which Munna manages to solve with his practical street level version of non-violent

protest. In one scene an old man calls from a government office to complain that he cannot get his pension approved;

Old Man: 'I'm a retired teacher son, I taught my students never to bribe, but now I'm being forced to bribe to get my own pension! The pension officer has withheld it for two years. I'm in serious trouble son'

Munna: 'That pension is your right sir! We'll get it out of him.'

Old Man: 'what should I do son?'

Munna: 'Shame him, show the world how corrupt he is. I have an idea'

(The scene cuts to the old man walking up to the pension officer's desk)

Old Man: 'Greetings'

The officer sighs with boredom and looks back down to the papers on his desk

Old Man: (placing his wallet on the desk) 'here is 1200 Rupees'

Officer: '1200 won't get you anywhere mister'

Old Man: 'be patient my son I have more.' (he takes off his glasses and puts them on the desk), 'my glasses are worth 500 Rupees'; (then he removes his hearing aid), 'Hearing aid, 500 Rupees'; (then he carries on removing personal items and putting them on the desk); 'my watch, 800 Rupees; My diabetes pills, 18 Rupees.'

Officer: 'hey hey, just a minute, what's going on here?'

Old Man: 'hold on, one minute' (unbuttoning his shirt)

Officer: 'what on earth is going on here?'

Old Man: 'shirt, 200 Rupees'

Officer: 'Sir, please stop!'

Old Man: ‘one minute... Vest, 25 Rupees; Belt, 100 Rupees; shoes, 300 Rupees’

Officer: (as the old man removes his trousers) ‘Please stop sir, it’s enough I beg you! I’ll approve your pension, just stop!’

Old Man: ‘my trousers, 300 Rupees’

Officer: ‘I will sign!’ (he stamps the pension form) ‘Hey bring this man his pension, quick! Hurry!’

The crowd that has gathered to see the spectacle cheers as in the studio Munna cries ‘three cheers for *Gandhigiri*!’

(Dialogue taken from the English subtitles to Lage Raho Munna Bhai, (Hirani 2006)

This scene spawned imitative videos posted on You Tube by students at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur attempting to publicise the use of the Right to Information as an anti-corruption tool⁴³, and even gained the attention of the prime minister who referred to it in a speech to the Central Bureau of Investigation in 2006;

‘When I recently watched the popular hindi movie, Lage Raho Munnabhai, the one incident that touched me most was the ordeal of a senior citizen trying to get his pension without having to pay a bribe. In stripping his clothes, as an act of protest, this pensioner was stripping our system, exposing the ugly nakedness of the self-aggrandisement of those who man our institutions of governance. Any system in which a retired senior citizen is required to pay a bribe to secure his legitimate dues is a most despicable system. Such corruption must be visited by the sternest action to reform, restructure and rejuvenate the system. The very legitimacy of the State and its various institutions is brought into question by such illegal exercise of power and authority.’

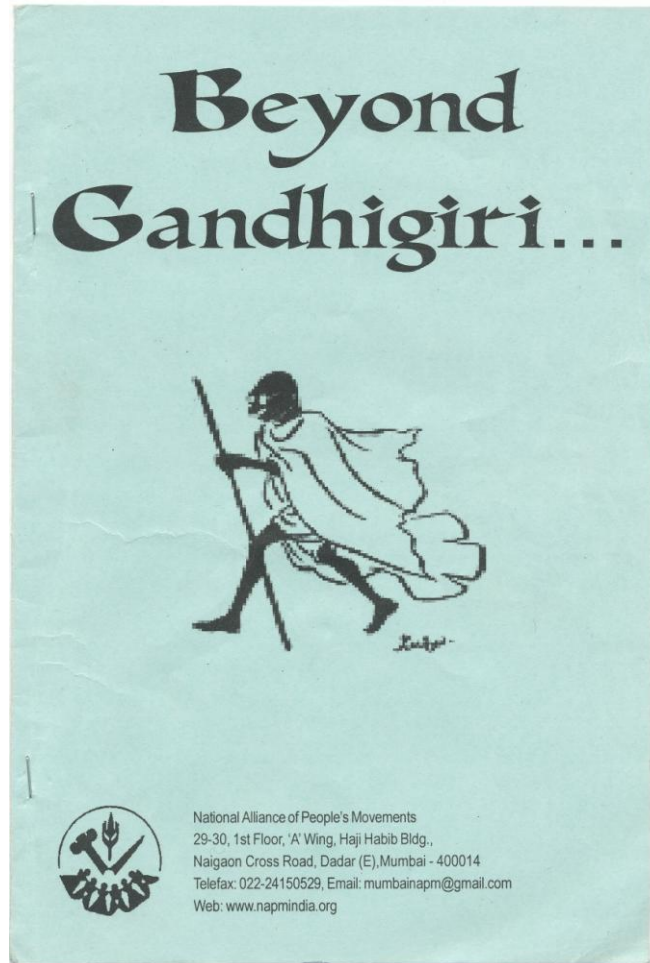
⁴³ See the short video entitled ‘Chakesh Mishra: An IITian for RTI’ on the Youtube website (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1hF8Qb5VG8> last accessed 24th October 2010) in which IIT Kanpur students act out the ‘shirt off’ scene from Lage Raho Munnabhai. Subtitled ‘Gandhigiri or RTI?’ the premise of the story is as in the film, a supplicant member of the public is attempting to get a lazy bureaucrat to do his work. Only in this version the protest fails, the civil servant watches the man take off his clothes and when he has reached his underpants demands those too. The voiceover at the end of the film then suggests that if you use the Right to Information then you will get results that Gandhigiri cannot achieve.

(Manmohan Singh, key note address to the conference of CBI & State Anti-Corruption Bureaux at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi on November 17, 2006)

The film ends happily with Munna and Jhanvi getting married. The final scene of the film is narrated by Gandhi sitting in the library where Munna first met him. He explains what happened to the characters, then goes on;

‘You’re wondering what happened to me right? I was shot down years ago, but three bullets cannot kill my beliefs [...] The choice is yours, live with my picture, or live by my principles’ (Hirani 2006)

Although *Lage Raho Munnabhai* was the more successful of the two films, it did not have such an obvious effect on the repertoire of protest in Delhi as *Rang De Basanti*. But it did catch the public imagination, and as with *Rang De Basanti*’s entry into the Oscars, also became a symbol of Indian national pride. The film was shown to the UN General assembly in 2006 as part of the Indian government’s successful lobbying effort to have October 2nd, M.K. Gandhi’s birthday, declared International Non-Violence day (Chaudhury 2007). After the film was released jokes started to circulate on internet list-serves and chat rooms concerned with transparency issues in the city about sending the Chief Information Commissioner flowers and a get well soon card from activists unhappy at his actions. The newspapers reported how *Gandhigiri* was used in protests against US immigration laws (Hindustan Times, 11th July 2007), by doctors at Delhi’s AIIMS hospital (The Hindu, October 12th 2006). The effect of the film was to prompt widespread comment about citizen activism and the state in the media and in politics and add to the zeitgeist already created by *Rang De Basanti*. Activist groups keen to capitalise on the mood picked up *Gandhigiri* and started to reference it in their pamphlets, such as this one from the National Alliance of Peoples’ Movements (NAPM) which calls for a renewal of the freedom struggle.



As Yogendra Yadav writes inside;

'Munnabhai gives another opportunity to renew Gandhi, this time for middle class India that loves to hate politics. This opportunity is about recovering an extraordinary instrument of collective action forged in this country about a century ago and discovering the potential of small men and women to bring about historical transformation. It could be about reinventing politics for you and me' (National Association of People's Movements 2007, 2)

Although *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* has a very different style to *Rang De Basanti* it contains very similar messages. Both films present a narrative of a nation brought down by crony capitalism and bureaucratic corruption, yet partly redeemed by individual transformation realised through activism and mediated through technology. It is significant that both films contain a plot device in which a radio station is taken over at gunpoint in order that the protagonists might confess and communicate the “truth” via a radio phone in. The device allows the radio broadcast to become a solution to the problem of imagining the nation as an inclusive entity (Rajagopal 2008, 304) as listeners from different class and religious backgrounds emotionally engage, and respond using mobile phones. By intertwining contemporary and historical discourses about corruption, bureaucracy, transparency and the nation the films put the good governance agenda into an Indian context, presenting it as a hybrid form of the national struggle for freedom in which transparency and accountability are presented as secular, humanist and personal qualities.

So to sum up, in these three sections we have seen first how people describe the state and their interactions with it through informal narratives of corruption and connection. These narratives present a popular and practical understanding of the blurred boundaries between state and society, how people must negotiate them to get work done. Next I have introduced examples of the use and production of narratives of corruption from within public culture that are presented for entertainment and make implicit connections between individual actions, unveiled through the use of technology, and a sense of national moral disintegration. In the last section I have introduced the two most successful films showing during my fieldwork, films that take this sense of the nation and explicitly refer it back to the freedom struggle and particular iconic individuals of unquestionable moral authority. Through the chapter we have travelled from the idea of a morally ambivalent individual who must negotiate and connect to get by in society, via a public reading in which the structure of society and cultural norms are presented as degenerate, and then returned to a new freedom struggle in which personal moral transformation is realised through activism and active citizenship, mediated through technology. In the next chapter I will pick up these

threads again as I turn to accounts of activist campaigns to implement legal mechanisms for transparency and accountability, in particular the Right to Information.

Chapter 5: Disciplining the Everyday State and Society?

‘It was the dream of a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts, the dream of there no longer existing any zones of darkness, zones established by the privileges of royal power or the prerogatives of some corporation, zones of disorder’
Foucault in ‘Power/Knowledge’, (1980, 152)

We have seen how films such as *Rang De Basante* and *Lage Raho Munnabhai* reference a modern idea of citizen activism and national renewal by reinterpreting the freedom struggle for an age of electronic media. But although these stories certainly have effects, and can be harnessed by those wishing to encourage people to get involved with activism, the suggestion that the intervention and mediation of media networks might cause the almost instantaneous development of social movements for change is largely a romantic one. They tell us little about how such movements might work, where they might come from, what interests might be involved and how power relations within groups might play out. In reality the efforts of the activist groups that I encountered in Delhi were based on hard work and struggle, long term organisation, campaigning, and the ebb and flow of networks of support and individual commitment; in other words, on the messy connections, complications and contingencies of social life.

In this chapter I begin to explore this social scene by introducing the core concept to which all the activist groups and informants that I encountered in the field subscribe. This is the idea that public access to government information is the key to transparency and public accountability, and thus to combating corruption. In particular I will focus on the central theme around which anti-corruption efforts orbited during my fieldwork; the innovative application of the Right to Information Act of 2005. There is little space here for a detailed history of the campaign for the Right to Information, and much of that story has already been described in the work of other scholars and activists (Jenkins and Goetz 1999, Jenkins and Goetz 2003; Jenkins 2007; Mentschel 2005; Pande 2008; Baviskar 2006; Kirmani 2007; Mander 2003; Mander and Joshi 1999; Roy

and Dey 2001a; Corbridge et al. 2005, 221-224)⁴⁴. However, it is important that I introduce the development of the use of the Right to Information as a legal mechanism, and the way in which groups have attempted to use it to actively discipline the everyday state and society.

By using the term ‘discipline’ in this context I am referring not only to the juridicial penalties for non-compliance that are built into the Right to Information Act, but also to discipline in the Foucaultian sense. That is, to the intention for the Right to Information to have a normalising influence on the bureaucracy, to act as a disciplinary mechanism that produces a ‘penalty of the norm which is irreducible in its principles and functioning to the traditional penalty of the law’ (Foucault 1977, 183). Through its application process the Act has the potential to be used by ordinary individuals as an *examination* of bureaucratic processes that can fix responsibility onto individual officers. As Foucault suggests:

‘The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish’ (1977, 184)

By using the Right to Information Act the ‘gaze’ of the omnipresent developmental state, of *Maa-Baap Sarkar* (lit: Mother-Father government), which surveys, inspects, quantifies, analyses and problematises populations (Scott 1998), and attempts to implement ‘technologies of rule’ (Corbridge et al. 2005, 5-6) through its agents and agencies, is returned, offering the possibility that those agents might be held to account. Through requesting information the observing hierarchy, the ‘economy of visibility’ (Foucault 1977, 187) between citizen and state might be fundamentally altered.

As we shall see, in practice this is not always the case. Attempts to return the gaze of the state in this way are limited by a number of factors, in particular the social position, literacy and ability to ask the right questions of those applying for information, and the

⁴⁴ and is also the subject of ongoing research. Suchi Pande of the Institute of Development Studies in the UK is currently undertaking a detailed study of the origins and development of the Right to Information in India as her Dphil dissertation project

exemption of parts of government from Right to Information requests on the grounds of national security. However, these limitations notwithstanding, this use of transparency legislation, an attempt to apply the ‘panoptic principle’ (Foucault 1977, 216)⁴⁵ was the central focus of the anti-corruption activism that I encountered during my fieldwork.

I seek to address two questions in this chapter, which are; how do activist groups attempt to discipline the everyday state and society by encouraging the public to use the right to access information from the government? And in turn; how do activists necessarily accommodate the nature of the everyday state and society into the practices of transparency activism?

I begin this task by tracing the emergence of the Right to Information and the contemporary practices of Right to Information activism through the documented stories of three significant and interrelated groups; The *Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan* (MKSS) in Rajasthan, *Parivartan* in Delhi and the National Campaign for Peoples Right to Information (NCPRI), also based in Delhi. In these three organisations we encounter a combination of ‘grassroots’ activism linked to ‘policy’ level work by leading activists rich in social and cultural capital who are able to obtain influential access to high level government committees and senior politicians. Then I introduce the practice of transparency and accountability activism at a more prosaic level through ethnographic accounts of a large scale activist campaign to raise awareness of the Right to Information, and a visit to a government office to perform a public audit on behalf of an illiterate client. In these examples the social and cultural capital of those applying for official information, the ability to negotiate with officials and operate paper processes, and expert knowledge about official procedures, play a significant role in the outcome of encounters between bureaucrats and those seeking information. These examples reveal some of the strategies, practices and enduring limitations inherent in attempts to encourage active citizenship, transparency and accountability in contemporary India (Jenkins and Goetz 1999, 608) and contribute to the unpacking of transnational discourses of transparency, accountability, rights and

⁴⁵ Referring to the panoptic principle Foucault says ‘In appearance, it is merely the solution of a technical problem; but, through it, a whole type of society emerges.’ (Foucault, 1977: 216)

anti-corruption that have gathered under the umbrella of good governance (Sampson 2005; Anders 2005; Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall 2004).

The Emergence of the Right to Information in Law and Practice: Three Activist Stories

I will not dwell for too long on the genesis of the Right to Information in India, rather I would like to focus on the development of the Right to Information Act of 2005 and legal mechanisms related to it, and the uses to which these have been put by activists, particularly in the work of different *sangathans*. However, it is worth noting at the beginning that the idea of a Right to Information has a history in India beyond the recent rise of the good governance paradigm and has been discussed many times in significant government reports and legal cases since independence in 1947.

As activists often point out, the Right to Information is implied in the Indian Constitution (Government of India 2007). Citizens need to be informed about the workings of government and parliament in order to properly exercise their rights to the freedom of speech and expression (article 19), to the right to life and liberty (article 21), to receive the guarantees that the constitution provides and perform the duties of a citizen that it requires (Mukhopadhyay 2007, 87). The issue of public access to information was raised in the influential 1964 'Santhanam Committee' report into the prevention of corruption when it discussed the control of information by government officials and the problem of its sale:

'One of the causes of this type of corruption is the undue secrecy maintained in regard to matters in respect of which it is not necessary to do so. A clear distinction should be made as to what information should be treated as 'secret' and what should be made freely available to the public. Any member of the public who wants to have information of the latter category should be able to approach some specified officer in each ministry/department undertaking for that purpose and get what he wants' (1964: 48)

A prescient comment, although at the time this was buried in a section looking at ‘other preventative measures’ for corruption.

Another example popular with activists is the 1975 Supreme Court judgement in the case of Raj Narain vs the State of Uttar Pradesh, which rescinded the election of the Prime minister Indira Gandhi on the grounds of electoral malpractice, and precipitated the declaration of the Emergency in 1975. The judgement included this paragraph:

‘In a government of responsibility like ours, where all the agents of the public must be responsible for their conduct, there can be but few secrets. The people of this country have a right to know every public act, everything that is done in a public way, by their public functionaries. They are entitled to know the particulars of every public transaction in all its bearing. The right to know, which is derived from the concept of freedom of speech, though not absolute, is a factor which should make one wary, when secrecy is claimed for transactions which can, at any rate, have no repercussion on public security. To cover with veil [of] secrecy the common routine business, is not in the interest of the public. Such secrecy can seldom be legitimately desired. It is generally desired for the purpose of parties and politics or personal self-interest or bureaucratic routine. The responsibility of officials to explain and to justify their acts is the chief safeguard against oppression and corruption.’ (Sinha 1975, (3) 333:27)

During the 1980s the issue continued to be raised during Supreme Court proceedings on environmental issues (Mukhopadhyay 2007, 87) and in debates between journalists, bureaucrats and parliamentarians about the freedom of the press to access information and report on government (Prasad 1987, 17); however, although the merits of a Right to Information were talked about at the highest level until the 1990s no attempt was made to operationalise it with a legal mechanism.

The MKSS Story

In northern India a particular narrative has come to dominate accounts of the development of the Right to Information activism scene in the 1990s, that of the

movement for information legislation that came out of Rajasthan, led by the MKSS. However, as the political scientist Rob Jenkins shows in his 2004 chapter 'In Varying States of Decay' (2004, 219) there are other stories. For example, in the early 1990's a grassroots group known as the *Brashtachar Virodhi Jan Andolan* (BVJA) (Peoples Movement Against Corruption), led by the veteran social activist and environmentalist Anna Hazare (Gadgil and Guha 1995, 104), developed in Maharashtra using strategies similar to the MKSS, and with a focus on the importance of access to information as a tool with which to combat corruption (Jenkins 2004, 220-231). However it is the story of the MKSS that is particularly relevant here due to the influence of the group on the strategies used by transparency activists and *sangathans* in Delhi during my fieldwork.

In the early 1990's MKSS activists were attempting to organise villagers in drought affected areas of Rajasthan, who had been working on government organised public works schemes, to obtain unpaid wages. In particular they sought to access the 'muster rolls', registers of employment that showed the names of people employed, days worked and the amount paid for labour. At first the documents could only be obtained through the assistance of sympathetic bureaucrats or by public protest and pressure (Jenkins and Goetz 2003, 127). When documents became available the information was checked systematically to see if the works cited actually existed, interviews carried out with labourers to ascertain if they had been paid the amounts shown and whether all of the people listed in the muster rolls actually existed. Often it was discovered that bogus workers had been added to the rolls in order that officials might claim their wages (Jenkins 2004, 223-224). The MKSS' main innovation in the mid 1990's was to organise the collective analysis of the documents that they had obtained. This was done through *Jan Sunwais* (public hearings) at which official records of public expenditure would be read out to assemblies of villagers presided over by a panel of eminent individuals from the local area and further afield. The strategy of holding *Jan Sunwais* was augmented by large scale *dharna* (static protests or sit ins) in urban centres, including the state capital Jaipur, to demand a legal basis for accessing government information, and for citizens to be allowed to photocopy documents (Jenkins and Goetz 1999, 605-606, 2003, 127-128).

In some cases the revelations of corruption and embezzlement at the *Jan Sunwais* resulted in the repayment of public money by local officials (Baviskar 2010, 135), and in 2000, partly in response to the pressure applied through lengthy public protests in the state capital Jaipur, the Rajasthan state legislature passed a Right to Information law and amended the state Panchayati Raj Act to give local *sabhas* (village committees) the power to perform social audits (Corbridge et al. 2005, 223; Baviskar 2010, 137)⁴⁶.

While the MKSS does not have a leadership in a formal sense certain individuals have achieved public prominence through their involvement with the group. The best known of these is Aruna Roy, a highly articulate woman from an upper middle class background who left her position in the elite Indian Administrative Service (IAS) to work first with the Social Work Research Centre (SWRC), an NGO run by her husband Sanjit ‘Bunker’ Roy, before beginning work with the MKSS in the late 1980’s. Roy has become one of the leading lights of the national Right to Information campaign and received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership in 2000⁴⁷.

The Parivartan Story

If the MKSS provides the most often cited Right to Information case study from a rural area then in urban India that role is taken by *Parivartan* (lit: Change) from Delhi. *Parivartan* began in 2000 as an association of middle class professionals. Originally called *Sampoorn Parivartan* (Complete Change) the group started by attempting to persuade people not to pay, and report demands for, bribes at the Income Tax office where one of the *Sampoorn Parivartan* members, Arvind Kejriwal a charismatic IAS

⁴⁶ A first hand activist account of the development of the MKSS and the connection between the struggle for the Right to Information and other local issues such as land reform can be found in the article by Dey and Sampat(2005) in the 2005 Sarai reader ‘Bare Acts’, and online at <http://www.sarai.net/publications/readers/05-bare-acts> . There are also many other activist accounts of the influence of the MKSS, for example see Mander and Joshi (1999) amongst others at http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/ai/rti/india/national_archives.htm Last Accessed 24th October 2010

⁴⁷ See <http://www.rmaf.org.ph/Awardees/Biography/BiographyRoyAru.htm> last accessed 24th October 2010

officer and graduate of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur, held the position of Deputy Commissioner. *Sampoorn Parivartan* activists would assist in filing complaints against the officers concerned. In India comparatively few people qualify to pay income tax and seeking an issue that would reach a wider demographic the group then turned its attentions to the government managed Delhi *Vidyut* (electricity) Board (DVB). *Sampoorn Parivartan* volunteers would stand outside DVB offices asking people not to pay bribes and offering to help people with grievances, (Jenkins, 2007: 63; Baviskar, 2006: 12) interfering with the business of *dalaals* (middlemen) operating outside the offices (interview with Arvind Kejriwal August 27th 2007; also see (Baviskar 2010, 138; Jenkins 2007, 63). However the group were not satisfied that their actions were making a difference to people's interactions with the bureaucracy. In an interview quoted by Baviskar⁴⁸ Arvind Kejriwal notes that 'we too were acting as brokers, albeit honest brokers', and that the group felt that they were not encouraging people to 'exercise their own agency' (2010, 138), a sentiment that Kejriwal repeated to me in interview, 'We were like middle men, and this was not something that we could do all over the country' (interview, 27th August 2007).

When the Delhi Right to Information Act (Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi 2001) was passed in 2001, under the Congress government of Sheila Dixit, *Sampoorn Parivartan*, inspired by the work of the MKSS, began to promote it as a way for people to get information on which to base complaints against government agencies. At first the group used what activists call the 'Delhi Act' in their work with the DVB and discovered that putting in Right to Information applications asking for the whereabouts of pending work had an effect on the bureaucracy that was 'almost like magic' (interview with Arvind Kejriwal, August 27th 2007). After the Right to

⁴⁸ In this section I have drawn upon the work of Rob Jenkins (2007) and Amita Baviskar (2010). Both have written about the RTI movement in India and about Parivartan and the National Campaign for Peoples Right to Information (NCPRI). The chapter by Baviskar in particular is based on research that preceded my own quite closely and includes interviews and quotes from figures within the RTI movement that are often remarkably similar to those that I recorded later in 2006-7. The detail of Baviskar's paper supports the narratives about the passing of the Right to Information Act that I present here, and I am more than happy to draw upon it in order to construct my own argument. However, the apparent similarity of the interview data raises an interesting issue that I will address in chapter 7. That is, the role of rhetoric and control of public representations of the self and activist groups in activist accounts and practice.

Information application was submitted to the office in question delayed work would often be completed very quickly. By this time Kejriwal had taken extended leave from his position in the Revenue Service and after a disagreement about whether *Sampoorn Parivartan* should be formally registered or remain as an informal citizens group the group split with Kejriwal and other volunteers continuing to work informally as *Parivartan*. It is this group that the name *Parivartan* will refer to from now on.

In an attempt to further broaden its activities *Parivartan* began working in slum areas of east Delhi. In 2002, inspired by the MKSS, it held its first *Jan Sunwai* (public hearing) concerning the use of public money in the development of local amenities by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) (Singh undated, 10). Further campaigns focused on monitoring the system of fair price shops that distribute subsidised food and fuel, to families with government issued ration cards, through the Public Distribution System (PDS). The practice of shop owners falsifying records of government grain supplies, and sales to those with ration cards, and then selling the embezzled grain on the open market had become commonplace and *Parivartan* organised a mass verification exercise in which over 300 people applied for records concerning the operation of the PDS in east Delhi (Right To Food Campaign 2003). *Parivartan* volunteers faced violence and legal challenges from ration shop owners. However, the campaign, organised in concert with groups working in other parts of the city, and with pressure applied by nationally prominent activists from outside Delhi, including Aruna Roy of the MKSS, did manage to persuade the Delhi Food Commissioner to institute a framework in 2005 for the public scrutiny of PDS records. Ration card holders can now visit food supply offices to inspect records and lodge complaints on two Saturdays of every month (Pande 2008, 52-53).

Rob Jenkins argues that *Parivartan* are an example of a 'second wave' of anti-corruption activism that managed to bridge the class differences between anti-corruption movements through an increased focus on overseeing anti-poverty programmes directed at those that failed to benefit from the speedy growth of the economy. Middle class Residents Welfare Association activists might hold the link between poor constituencies and vote bank politics responsible for a lack of

governance. Movements drawn from the poor might blame the middle classes for preserving their privileges, amongst which are the ability to afford bribes. But Jenkins argues groups such as *Parivartan* can work effectively as coalitions between the middle classes and the urban poor by bringing together groups at the borders of these broad categories. The gap between the aspirant slum dweller and the lower middle classes is actually narrower than it might appear at first (2007, 62).

I would not disagree with Jenkins' analysis. My interviews with *Parivartan* activists and observations of the organisation of campaigns do bear this idea out to some extent. However, I feel care should be taken not to skim over power relations within groups such as *Parivartan*. My ethnographic engagement with the group suggests that *Parivartan* has a client base within, and can mobilise numbers of, the urban poor, while the activist core of the group is comprised of people from the Hindi speaking middle classes and lower middle classes with at least three English speaking college graduates, including Arvind Kejriwal. I would argue that it is the work of this core group that makes *Parivartan* visible in Delhi's 'civil society' scene. During my fieldwork in 2006-7 *Parivartan* was operating as a local *sangathan* in east Delhi with, as far as I could ascertain, 7 full time workers including Arvind Kejriwal, more than half of whom were receiving 'fellowships'⁴⁹ through their connection to the group. Volunteers to the group come and go. Over the last decade, and most recently in 2007, middle class activists formerly associated with *Parivartan* as workers or volunteers have left to form other *sangathans* working in different parts of the city. These groups are less well known perhaps but doing similar advocacy work for local clients using the Right to Information Act to intercede in cases where people are having difficulty with bureaucratic processes.

As with the MKSS the *Parivartan* constellation has shone quite brightly in recent years, and Arvind Kejriwal's star has been brightest among it. In 2004 he gained a fellowship from the Ashoka Foundation and left his post at the Revenue Service. In 2006 he won the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award for Emergent Leadership, as well as being

⁴⁹ A fellowship is a monthly stipend paid to individual activists by individual donors or organisations. I will discuss fellowships in more detail in chapter 8.

named 2006 ‘Indian of the Year in Public Service’ by the CNN-IBN news channel⁵⁰. While groups such as the MKSS and Parivartan are grassroots organisations which espouse a non party political and non-hierarchical ethos and accept no institutional funding, it is worth noting the ability of leading members of these organisations to articulate their message nationally and internationally and utilise social connections to committed politicians, journalists and established NGOs in order to build a voice in the policy process (Jenkins 2004, 226; Jenkins and Goetz 1999, 619-620; Corbridge et al. 2005, 225; Baviskar 2010, 141). The ability of particular groups and individuals within the movement to operate at this policy level has been crucial in the process that led to the passing of national Right to Information Act of 2005, and with this in mind I will briefly introduce the National Campaign for People’s Right to Information (NCPRI).

The NCPRI Story and the Passing of the National Right to Information Act 2005.

The NCPRI began in 1996 as a national level lobbying group based in Delhi bringing together senior activists, journalists, lawyers, academics, and retired civil servants, from the Anglophone intelligentsia. Together with the Press Council of India the NCPRI formulated a draft national Right to Information bill under the guidance of a retired justice of the Supreme Court, P B Sawant. This was presented to the government which appointed a committee to consider the bill headed by H D Shourie. The Shourie committee produced a diluted draft which after further amendments was introduced into Parliament in 2000 as the Freedom of Information Bill (Singh undated, 15; Kirmani 2007, 6)⁵¹. The bill was passed in 2002 as the Freedom of Information Act but a date for its commencement was not set and it never came into effect. As Kirmani notes this was later seen by activists as a blessing as the Act was severely limited in scope and did

⁵⁰ For details of the Ramon Magsaysay Award see <http://www.rmaf.org.ph/Awardees/Citation/CitationKejriwalArv.htm> (last accessed 20th October 2010) and for the Indian of the Year Award see http://www.indianoftheyear.com/2007/winner_2006.html (last accessed 20th October 2010)

⁵¹ For detail of the development of the NCPRI I will draw on the paper by Singh (n.d.). Shekhar Singh was formerly the convenor of the NCPRI and present during all of the NCPRI’s lobbying efforts in the lead up to the passing of the Right to Information Act. I am grateful to him for providing a draft copy of his paper and for the interview data that I will draw upon in later sections.

not contain a penalty mechanism to provide ‘compulsion for resistant public officials to abide by its principles’ (Kirmani 2007, 6; Mogilishetty-Farias n.d.). In a simultaneous process beginning with Tamil Nadu and Goa in 1997 a number of states had actually passed freedom of information legislation but with varying powers and often with wide ranging exemption clauses⁵².

If the process of passing a national Right to Information law had lost some impetus through the failure to implement the Freedom of Information Act then the 2004 parliamentary elections provided a fresh opportunity. The incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was replaced by a Congress led ‘United Progressive Alliance’ (UPA) coalition. In order to clearly set out its aims in government the UPA produced a National Common Minimum Programme (CMP) (Govt. of India, 2004) which amongst other things made a

‘solemn pledge to the people of our country: to provide a government that is corruption-free, transparent and accountable at all times, to provide an administration that is responsible and responsive at all times.’ (2004: 3)

The UPA also set up a National Advisory Committee (NAC) to oversee the implementation of the CMP, chaired by arguably the most powerful figure in the Congress Party, Sonia Gandhi, and including Aruna Roy of the MKSS and the development economist and social activist Jean Dreze, both members of the working committee of the NCPRI. The first task that the NAC undertook was to draft amendments to the Freedom of Information Act of 2002 (Baviskar 2010, 145; Kirmani 2007, 15; Roy 2004). The amendments were drafted with the support of expert members of the NCPRI working committee and after almost a year of lobbying and reworking the amended bill passed through parliament as the Right to Information Act 2005. Key to the amendments were the penalty clauses set out in section 20 of the Act

⁵² 1997 – Tamil Nadu and Goa. 2000 – Rajasthan and Karnataka. 2001 – Delhi. 2002 – Maharashtra and Assam. 2003 – Madhya Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. For more details of the individual acts see the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative website at http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=66&Itemid=85 (last accessed 28th July 2010)

(Govt. of India, 2005: 17), offering the promise of large fines for officials failing to provide information within proscribed time limits.

Scholars have noted how the organisational strategy of the NCPRI working committee and allied groups has been to exploit high level networks and contacts with government (Jenkins and Goetz 1999, 619-620; Baviskar 2010, 143). Senior activists have taken advantage of the blurred boundaries and personal connections between state and society, to access the policy process. A paradox appears in that activist efforts to bring discipline to the everyday state and society, particularly at the lower level, are facilitated by a policy process that in part operates through the everyday state and society at an elite level.

Activists have to be pragmatic about using the necessary connections to get things done. Talking about the way that activists used high level networks in the period before the passing of the Act a leading figure in the Right to Information scene told me;

‘I don’t know how things work elsewhere, but in India the greatest power that you can have is access to people who are in power. By and large we knew every time something significant happened internally... somebody or the other would alert somebody or the other... even now we get alerted that [a] file is in the Prime Minister’s office and some decision is going to be made in the next two three days so if you want to talk to him then this is the right time’ (Interview, December 2006)

As an international NGO worker and lawyer, who had been involved in the campaign to get the Right to Information Act 2005 passed, commented to me in interview: the campaign that led to the passing of the Act was not easily ‘replicable’ in development terms because of the unique access of leading activists (telephone interview July 2008). The elite connections of a group such as the NCPRI, a group formed specifically to work at the policy level, do not invalidate the well documented grassroots struggles for governmental transparency and accountability, but I would argue that they do begin to show how important social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 243-252) are to the practice of activism, a theme that I will return to in this and subsequent chapters.

While the passing of the Right to Information Act was a coup for groups involved with the national Right to Information campaign it did not significantly change the work that Right to Information *sangathans* were doing on the ground in Delhi. They had already been working to oversee the implementation of the state Right to Information law and using it strategically in their campaigns on other issues. This continued to be the case with the national Act which superseded the state acts that stood in 2005.

The Right to Information is a neutral law directed at enforcing a rational legal bureaucracy. Although it has partly developed out of struggles for social justice it is not directed towards social justice per se and can just as easily be used to pursue causes that left leaning activists associated with the NCPRI might consider unjust, such as assisting in the legal process of evicting urban slum dwellers from public land. But it is also this focus on *enforcing* rationality in the bureaucracy that makes the Right to Information Act of 2005 so different compared to previous attempts to inculcate discipline in the everyday state and society. The law was drafted with the involvement of activists who had worked with and within the government, and is directly informed by their knowledge of the essential paper procedures that characterise bureaucracy in India. The practical application of the Right to Information Act is as an archaeological tool that can unearth paper processes and fix accountability to individual officers. Groups and individuals working with the Right to Information are essentially digging into bureaucratic processes and it is to empirical examples of the techniques that they have developed to combat corruption using this tool that I will now turn.

Information, its Applications and the Difference between Soochna and Jaankaari.

The work that Right to Information groups in Delhi carry out hinges on an idea of the individual citizen of India being able to access the rights and welfare provision guaranteed by the Constitution, including the right to information⁵³. A statement of this

⁵³ Section 2 of the Right to Information Act 2005 defines the public authorities covered by the act the first of which is 'any authority or body or institution of self-government established by or under the Constitution' (section 2 (h) (a) RTI act 2005). Also particularly relevant is part IV of the

idea often repeated at public meetings by activists to promote Right to Information use amongst low income groups, exemplifies this. This example comes from the *Parivartan* website but I heard and read other forms of the same statement many times during my fieldwork;

‘We all **pay taxes**. Even a beggar on the street pays tax. When he buys anything like a soap or a matchbox, he pays taxes in the form of sales tax, excise duty etc. **This money belongs to us**. It does not belong to any politician or a bureaucrat. It belongs to the people of India. The people are the masters. Governments exist to serve them.’

(*Parivartan*, Undated. Bold type in original)

The statement immediately positions people as citizens in relation to the state, not perhaps as they apprehend it on an everyday basis but as it is set out in the Constitution, a modern secular state that has responsibilities towards its citizens set out as fundamental rights and directive principles (Govt. of India, 2007 (1949): 6-19) if they will take responsibility for their role as rights bearers, set out as fundamental duties (Govt. of India, 2007 (1949): 20. Corbridge and Harris, 2003: 175).

The right to know might be operationalised in a number of ways. Government offices can display notice boards with necessary information, public works can have signs detailing the name of the contractor and the tender number, and increasingly government departments manage websites through which various types of information and bureaucratic procedures can be accessed⁵⁴. But these types of information remain at the surface level, if a person wishes to get to the underneath of things then they must dig deeper, and the tool provided for this is the Right to Information application.

Constitution referring to ‘Directive Principles of State Policy’ which sets out the government’s duties to provide work, welfare and sufficient nutrition to citizens, and article 19 which guarantees freedom of speech and expression <http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/welcome.html> (last accessed 20th October 2010)

⁵⁴ For example see <http://www.mcdonline.gov.in/> the web portal for the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.



(March 2007 - These signs offering “information” about the public works appeared across south Delhi as the Metro project ground its way inexorably towards Gurgaon, on target for the opening of the Commonwealth games in October 2010. The information that the Metro was coming and who was building it made little difference to those, such as Sachin’s family (see chapter 2), who were displaced by the building work)

The acronym ‘RTI’ describes not just the Right to Information as a concept but is also used by activists as a noun to describe a Right to Information application. The statement ‘we filed a number of RTIs on the matter’ makes perfect sense to activists, and ‘RTI’ is used in the same way by Hindi speakers, although they would refer to the ‘Right to Information’ in Hindi as ‘*Soochna ka Adhikar*’ (in which *Soochna* is official information and *Adhikar* translates as entitlement).

It is worth noting a distinction here between two Hindi words, *soochna* and *jaankaari*, that both mean information but are used in different ways by activists within the Right

to Information scene. *soochna* is data, the documentary information held by the government about people and processes that can be gained through *Soochna ka Adhikar* (Right to Information), while *jaankaari* is knowledge, the personal know-how necessary to work with bureaucratic processes, negotiate with gatekeepers, and for activists, to conduct the examination process that the Right to Information Act operationalises⁵⁵. Thus when Padma, a working class *karyakarti* (social worker) in a Delhi *sangathan*, outlines the procedures and difficulties of obtaining *soochna* (information) from a government department and the uses to which it can be put, she adds that this *jaankaari*, that is her knowledge of these procedures, took a great deal of *sangharsh* (struggle) to achieve (interview, 14th March 2007). Or when Padma's colleague Savitri dramatically asserts that '*soochna ki jaankari se aam admi awaz utha sakte hai*' (knowledge about information enables the common man to raise a voice), she employs both conceptualisations of information, making a distinction between dry data and embodied knowledge (interview, 7th March 2007). In the day to day work of activists belonging to Right to Information advocacy groups it is *jaankaari* concerning bureaucratic procedures and local power structures, knowledge about the intersections of the everyday state and society, which makes the difference. *Jaankaari* is a form of social and cultural capital in the sense that Bourdieu intended it (Bourdieu 1986, 243-252), a necessary attribute of the activist, the bureaucrat and the activist's alter-ego the *dalaal* (broker/middleman).

So to sum up thus far: I am suggesting that by attempting to employ the Right to Information as a disciplinary tool activists are attempting to make real ideal-typical boundaries between the public and private spheres, and between state and society. However, as with the lobbying process that led up to the passing of the 2005 Act, even in the practice of activism we see how these boundaries necessarily become blurred and how social and cultural capital emerge as important factors. To explore these themes further I will introduce two pieces of ethnography, one concerning an activist campaign and the other with the day to day work of a Right to Information *sangathan*.

⁵⁵ Note the similarity to the official position of *Jankar* (knowledgable person) that David Mosse describes in his ethnography of a DFID funded agricultural development project in central India (2005, 89). *Jankars* are those who have a privileged position in relation to the project and benefit from education and training.

The Drive Against Bribes.

In July of 2006 I attended an ‘information camp’ in central Delhi. The camp was held as part of a 15 day national campaign organised by a broad coalition of Right to Information groups, NGOs and national media organisations including NDTV and the Hindustan Times. The campaign’s title in Hindi was *Ghus ko Ghusa: Soochna ka Adhikar ke sath* (Strike [out] against Bribe: with Right to Information) with a vivid logo of a fist punching through the background of the text. The English translation was rather more anodyne; ‘Drive against Bribe with RTI’.



(Picture credits: English logo from www.ssvk.org Hindi logo from www.chaurichaura.com accessed September 7th 2009)

The campaign was instigated and led from Delhi by a network of groups and NGOs coordinated by *Parivartan*, utilising networks of regional activist groups and media partners to organise ‘RTI camps’ in cities across the country that people could attend for help with filing RTI applications. The campaign only targeted individuals that had overdue work pending with government departments. Its ‘Workbook and Trainers Guide’ sets out the main objective;

‘It is an anti-bribery campaign. People have to pay bribes in their daily interaction with government departments – be it getting a passport or a ration card or a license or an income tax refund etc. Everyone has to either pay a bribe or face harassment. Sometimes, even if bribe is not directly asked, still your work is not done due to laziness or simple bureaucratic delay. What does one do in such a situation? So far people were helpless. They could only curse the system and do nothing. Each of us when faced in a similar situation wondered whether there would ever be a time when

our country would get rid of this curse of bribery. Maybe that time has come. Now we need not pay a bribe in such a situation. We have the Right to Information Act which gets the work done' (Drive Against Bribe Campaign, 2006: 2)

The campaign was well organised and had been 'aggressively advertised' through its media partnerships. Messages of support had been recorded by Bollywood stars Akshay Kumar and Preity Zinta, and Infosys chief executive N. R. Narayana Murthy, and along with the appeals to viewers' moral and patriotic sensibilities the campaign also addressed those that required a more pragmatic approach with the slogan;

'You need not pay bribes any more in this country. Now you have an effective alternative – Right to Information. Use RTI. Often, it works faster than bribes' (Drive Against Bribe Campaign, 2006: 7)

The central Delhi information camp was set up on a wide and shady concourse of the Indira Gandhi Indoor (IGI) Stadium, symbolically close to some of the main targets of the campaign. The 'Delhi Secretariat' of the Government of Delhi, The offices of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), the headquarters of the Delhi Police, the Income Tax Office (ITO), and the offices of some of the leading daily newspapers which cluster around the frenetic traffic of the ITO intersection in central Delhi. Tables manned by volunteers waited to receive applicants. Many volunteers were students from Delhi University trained for the event, but there were also members of different Right to Information activist groups from the city and people from middle class Residents Welfare Associations familiar with using the Act for their own local issues. Off to one side a table had been placed for two officers from the Central Vigilance Commission, sent by their department to receive complaints about demands for bribery.



(Indira Gandhi Stadium information camp, July 2006. Picture, Martin Webb)

In this campaign an ‘RTI’ took the form of a pre-prepared document (see below) setting out questions designed to interrogate the bureaucratic process that the applicant has become mired in.

from RTI CAMP 1/07/06

To
The PIO,

Date:

Sub: Application under Right to Information Act, 2005

I had made an application for the following reason (copy of application is attached) but no satisfactory action has been taken on my application so far.

Please provide the following information with respect to the same:

1. Please indicate the daily progress made on my application so far, i.e. when did my application reach which officer, for how long did it stay with that officer and what did he/she do during that period?
2. Please give the names and designations of the officials who were supposed to take action on my application and who have not done so?
3. What action would be taken against these officials for not doing their work and for causing harassment to the public? By when would that action be taken?
4. By when would my work be done now?
5. Please give me a list of all the applications/returns/petitions/grievances received, after my application/return/petition/grievance was received. The list should contain the following information:
 - ☐ Name of applicant/taxpayer/petitioner/aggrieved person
 - ☐ Receipt no
 - ☐ Date of application/return/petition/grievance
 - ☐ Date of disposal
6. Please give copy or print out of those portions of records, which contains details of receipt of the above applications/returns/petitions/grievances
7. Please give reasons for out of turn disposal of the applications/ returns/ petitions/ grievances, if any, which were received after me.
8. By when would vigilance enquiries be initiated in the above matter of out of turn disposal of applications/returns/petitions/grievances, if any?
- 9.

I am separately depositing Rs 10 as application fee.

Yours sincerely,

Name:

Address:

Phone:

(Original Right to Information application taken from the IGI Stadium Drive Against Bribe camp, July 2006. 'PIO' refers to the public information officer of the relevant department)

The questions in this application for information are directed at the *individual* officers responsible for the processing of documents, asking not only for the names of officers

and how long the pending file may have been stuck with them but also how they might be disciplined and when. Questions 5 and onwards go further still by asking that the position of the application be located in the bureaucratic process, reasons provided for the 'out of turn disposal' of applications received after the petitioner's, and when disciplinary proceedings might be begun. There is no doubt that the application is composed in knowledge of, and pointed directly at, practices which transgress the boundary between public and private roles, and knowingly employs an impossibly ideal procedural model. The application is Weber's rational-legal bureaucratic ideal type (1952: 21-22) fashioned into a *lathi* (policeman's cane stick) with which to threaten officials. While the questions can be answered in theory, in practice officials must do what they can to avoid answering, and an obvious course of action presents itself; to get the requested work done as quickly as possible in the hope this will satisfy the applicant

While walking from the bus stop to the IGI Stadium camp on the first morning of the campaign I met a young middle class Muslim man called Faisal who was also going there. After encountering several locked gates we helped each other climb over a fence and spent an entertaining 20 minutes wandering the grounds of the stadium attempting to find the main entrance. As we walked Faisal explained why he was there.

He was going to volunteer to help at the camp along with some friends from Delhi University, but he also had a grievance of his own; he had applied for his passport 16 months earlier and was still waiting. During this time, as he had no passport, he had missed opportunities to sit for examinations that would allow him to apply to foreign universities. I asked if he had faced a request for a bribe but he said no, he just assumed that his application had become lost in the system. His requests about its whereabouts had gone unanswered.

We reached the camp and found his friends who were sitting at a table waiting to help visitors. Faisal was their first case of the day and they helped him to fill out the pro forma application. This done Faisal and I left the camp together and went to the

Kashmere Gate post office in the old part of the city to file the application⁵⁶. It was not an easy task as the officers at the post office were unfamiliar with the procedure but after some waiting and visits to several different officials he managed to pay the 10 Rupee application fee, submit the papers and get a receipt (from field notes, July 1st 2006).

The deadline for answering Right to Information applications is, in most cases, thirty days. If no answer is received by that time the applicant may move to a first appeal, and if information is still not forthcoming make a second appeal to the office of the State or Central Information Commissioner, whichever has jurisdiction (see Govt of India, 2005). About two months later I contacted Faisal to see what the result of his application had been. We met in Chandni Chowk, the main thoroughfare of old Delhi and went up off the street to a corner of a quiet *masjid* (mosque) to talk. Faisal told me that a week after he had filed the RTI application he had gone to the passport office to check if it had been received. He had not really believed that the post office would forward it. It had reached the passport office and he was told by the officers there that his passport application was now on the priority list and shown proof of this on a computer screen. He was also called in to speak to the Public Information Officer (PIO) of the passport office who reassured him again. He was told that his papers had gone missing and that they had spent 7 days looking but had not been able to find them. They had found his photo and the reference to his original application on the computer and had decided to issue the passport on that basis. In the middle of August, a month and a half after his RTI had been submitted, he had finally received his passport. I asked him if he had received any of the information that his RTI application had requested, Faisal said that he had not, but that he was happy just to 'get his work done' (from field notes and interview recording August 30th 2006).

Faisal's case reveals much about the way that this type of Right to Information application works, and about the thrust of the Drive Against Bribes campaign in Delhi.

⁵⁶ In the case of applications to Central Govt. departments 629 post offices have been designated as Assistant Public Information Officers (APIOs). The RTI application and fee can be submitted to these offices and will be forwarded to the relevant department (Pande and Singh 2007, 14)

His application was directed at getting his work done rather than necessarily eliciting information. Faced with the questions in Faisal's 'RTI' the officers at the passport office chose to process his work as quickly as possible, even though they had lost the supporting documentation, in the hope that he would not pursue the matter any further. Faisal could have continued to appeal for the information but satisfied he chose not to.

In interview I suggested to Arvind Kejriwal of *Parivartan* that using the Right to Information in this way, while apparently effective, is not really in the spirit of the Right to Information Act. It does not encourage transparency or accountability, and I knew that some in the wider RTI movement were unhappy at this innovation. But Arvind defended the strategy vigorously

'AK - Yeah, a lot of people have criticised us for this, that this is not the right use of RTI, and that RTI is not meant for grievance redressal, but my question is why not? I mean the people are not doing anything illegitimate, they are not doing anything unethical, there is a law and this law can be used very creatively by different people in different ways, so people have used it for their grievance redressal. Suppose I have applied for a license and they ask me for a bribe, if RTI can get me the license without bribe, then I'm doing the right thing... do these people want that I should go and give a bribe rather than use RTI, what is the better way of doing it?

MW - I've seen it myself, with a guy that went to the passport office, it had this effect...

AK - So why not?...

MW - I can also understand the criticisms that are levelled against it saying "ok, you're challenging them, you're making them not ask for the bribe, but at the same time you're not actually interrogating what's going on in the process, and therefore not changing it"...

AK - you see in this society you have all kinds of people, there will be some people who will have time and energy, capacity to be able to challenge the system, to be able to make a difference to the system, so let them do that. Ordinary individuals, ordinary mortals while living their day to day lives are happy if they can live a legal life, a life through legal means, they don't want to pay a bribe, but they also don't have the capacity to make a big change in the system. If I go and approach my neighbour who everyday in the morning goes to the office, wife is also coming home harassed,

children are also harassed, if I ask him to go and make a big difference he will say no way, but if I tell him that look, have you applied for something? Is someone asking for a bribe, why don't you use RTI and he can do that, and if large numbers of people in the country start using it, isn't that a big change in the system automatically? That's a big change in the system, so why are we thinking that everyone should use RTI only for interrogating someone, for finding faults with someone. I think my take on this has been that just the process of using RTI is very empowering, we don't have to really find faults with the people, or to find faults with the system every time. It is important that we should do that, but every time we don't need to do that. If the people start using RTI on a large scale many things will start automatically falling in place.' (interview, August 27th 2007)

It is this idea of things 'automatically falling into place' in which we find the Foucaultian concept of discipline (1977, 183: 187) that lies within the promotion of transparency and accountability mechanisms such as the Right to Information; the *idea* that the public return of the gaze of the state by applying for information might inculcate discipline in its officials by making them conscious of surveillance, and that the practice of using the right to information might simultaneously produce an active and disciplined citizen. The Drive Against Bribe campaign was specifically directed towards this end, a mass media campaign to raise awareness with the practical, mechanical aim being to facilitate the filing of as many Right to Informations applications as possible⁵⁷.

On the second day of the camp I ran into a Right to Information activist that I knew from south Delhi. Anand is twenty five years old, unmarried and lives in Durga Camp one of the well hidden slums that fill in the gaps left between the middle class developments of south Delhi (see chapter 2). He is remarkable for his neighbourhood in that he is a graduate of one of the Hindi medium colleges of Delhi University. Anand has been working for a local Right to Information *sangathan* (organisation) for the last

⁵⁷ Statistics provided by the NDTV programme that closed the campaign, anchored by Siddharth the NDTV corruption beat reporter that we met in chapter 3, said that the different information camps around the country had received 44,000 visitors, 24,000 phone enquiries and had filed 18,000 RTIs over the 15 days (NDTV footage, 15th July 2006), although higher claims have been made by activists discussing the campaign in internet forums.

4 years and is essentially the day to day manager of its local operations. He had come to help at the camp but noted with a little scepticism the mostly middle class backgrounds of both volunteers and applicants. After all he pointed out: how could a daily labourer earning less than the minimum wage take the time off to cross the city and attend the camp? In fact the organisers of the campaign had attempted to address this issue by setting up outreach camps around the city⁵⁸; however, Anand's observation raises a key point about the use of the Right to Information Act. As a disciplinary technique it depends on the use of paper, literacy skills and, as we can see to some extent from Faisal's case, the ability to visit offices, complete paper processes and negotiate with bureaucratic gatekeepers. If, as anti-corruption activists would wish, marginalised and illiterate people in the city are to be included in the same individualised rational-legal processes of citizenship as the *padhe-likhe log* (people who can read and right), and not resort to the familiar channels of appealing directly, and often en masse, through what Chatterjee would call 'political society' (2001, 177), then their ability to participate in the process of disciplining the everyday state must be facilitated, at least to begin with. We will look further into this issue, and into some of the daily work of transparency activists in Delhi, by following Anand back to his own area of operations.

A Public Audit at the Food Supply Office.

On a Saturday morning in late June 2007 I met Anand at the *Soochna Ghar* (information centre) of the *sangathan* (grassroots organisation) that he works for. The information centre is actually a one car garage space in the bottom of a plain yellow block of Delhi Development Authority (DDA) flats in a suburb of south Delhi that lies just beyond the outer ring road. Outside the garage is a courtyard space with a few parked cars and beyond is a fairly wide and quiet tree lined road running through the middle of the DDA development with a few basic stalls providing essentials to the residents and passers by, fruit and vegetables, ironing services, puncture repairs. The street is one of the pockets of relative calm and shade that contribute to Delhi's reputation as a 'green' city.

⁵⁸ Comment on campaign outreach camps in Delhi can be read on activist blogs from the time, for example see <http://right2information.wordpress.com/category/rti-campgain/> last accessed 24th October 2010

The garage belongs to the family of Aditi, the upper middle class woman that heads the *sangathan*, and has a line of chairs down either wall, a little used computer and printer and a cotton carpet on the floor, also for people to sit on. On the walls are posters, some handmade, giving information about how people can access state assistance such as subsidised rations of wheat, rice and kerosene oil, and telling people that they can use *Soochna ka Adhikar 2005* (Right to Information 2005) to gain their rights in situations where government agents try to cheat, demand bribes or withhold rights. One of the handmade posters lists *hamare mudde* (our issues), ration, pension, birth and caste certificates, police, roads and the municipal council. The first three categories are the classic *khagaz* (paper) issues that the *sangathan* deals with daily, often for people who are not literate beyond the ability to sign their own names, if at all, but also for literate people unsure about completing applications correctly. On a weekday the information centre might have a number of people coming with problems related to any of these categories with the main focus being that of enabling people to get their *kaam* (work) done without having to pay a bribe to an official for processing the paperwork or to have a *dalaal* (paid middleman) intercede on their behalf. In cases where people have made applications and are suffering delays the *sangathan* will help them to use the RTI act to enquire into the progress of the work, and sometimes, as in the Drive Against Bribe, the simple act of a RTI application being submitted will be enough to get delayed work completed.

The importance of documents such as ration cards or identity cards cannot be underestimated. They provide access to the public distribution system (PDS) but are also part of the key to residency rights in a slum and can be used to prove ownership of land as well as being essential in the process of applying for other documents (Jha, Rao, and Woolcock 2007, 234). These are just some of the ‘paper truths’ (Tarlo 2003, 74) necessary in a system that does not entertain the paperless.

On this day Anand and I had arranged to go to the Food Supply Office to meet a woman called Kamla. Apparently she had not been receiving the subsidised rations that she is entitled to under the Public Distribution System (PDS) administered by the Delhi

state government. The PDS system is one of the oldest government welfare schemes, put in place after widespread food shortages in the 1960s and reorganised into the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) in 1997. Under the TPDS people receiving rations were divided according to income into Above Poverty Line (APL), Below Poverty Line (BPL) and Antyodaya⁵⁹ (AAY) cardholders with the poverty line for BPL card holders drawn at an annual income of Rs.24,200 (around £315 or US\$1.75/day). The cards give entitlements to different subsidies and commodities and are different colours. For example, for APL (white) cardholders rice is priced at Rs.9 per kg for, for BPL (yellow) at Rs.6.50 and for AAY (red) at Rs.3, and sugar is only available to BPL and AAY cardholders⁶⁰. Colloquially the cards are named by their colours in a mix of Hindi and English: *saphed card* for APL; *pila card* for BPL; and *lal card* for AAY.

In Delhi the scheme is administered by the state government and supplies wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene oil through a network of fair price shops and kerosene oil depots. The shops are often general stores licensed to distribute rations and kerosene to the cardholders in the area. The license application is made to the Assistant Commissioner of the relevant city zone, in our case South-West, and decided on by a ‘food committee’ made up of Food Supply department members on which the local Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) also sits. For the purposes of ration supply the city is divided up into 70 ‘circles’ of which the home turf of the *sangathan* takes in two. Each of these circles is administered by a Food Supply Office, known colloquially as the FSO, and overseen by a Food Supply Officer, also known as the FSO. We were visiting the food supply office on a hot Saturday morning to take advantage of the order passed by the Delhi government, after *Parivartan*’s PDS campaign of 2004, that the records of food supplied to fair price shops and sold by them to card holders would be opened for inspection by cardholders at the relevant circle food supply office on two Saturdays in a month (Pande 2008, 52-53).

⁵⁹ *Antyodaya*, meaning the poorest of the poor.

⁶⁰ Details of prices are taken from the Delhi Government Public Distribution System webpage and are correct as of September 2009. See <http://delhigovt.nic.in/dept/food/fpds1.asp> for more information and links to the relevant pages. Last accessed September 10th 2009.

The food supply office is a shabby 5 storey block in an ‘institutional area’, one of the zones carved out of the scrub on the outskirts of Delhi to provide accommodation to various institutes and govt offices. The buildings are from the 1980’s, concrete towers standing in watered grounds with the spindly Kikar trees that cover much of the undeveloped parts of South Delhi growing right up to the garden walls.

We entered and went up the stairs, Anand knew the way and led confidently. On the first floor there was a roughly whitewashed lobby with a row of plastic chairs attached to a steel bar, as you might find in a bus stop. On the wall next to the seats two large blue signs, one in English giving information on where to file an RTI application and the designations, addresses and telephone numbers of the Public Information Officer (PIO) and assistant PIO for this office, and the other in Hindi requesting the reader to ‘*Bhrastachar mitane mein madad kijie*’ (please help in eliminating corruption) and giving addresses of police ‘cells’ to whom to report any wrongdoing. The ubiquitous Delhi dust was thick on the floor and whitewash splattered over the signs on the wall and the pile of broken furniture in the corner of the lobby.

As we waited for Kamla I asked Anand about the areas that the food supply circles covered and he reeled off a list of South Delhi localities, mixing the posh colonies and the slums together, describing his patch, the parts of the city best known to him, even though the area that the *sangathan* effectively engages with is considerably smaller. Anand talked about the FSO in this office, a man he described as ‘normal’, neither bad nor good, but then added, ‘*binna ghus kam muscile hai*’(without a bribe work is difficult). He went on saying that the *rationwalla* (the fair price shopkeeper) had been withholding ration from Kamla, and added that the licenses for the shops are only allotted after bribes have been paid. Referring to the *rationwallas* Anand said ‘before, 100 from 100 are corrupt’ but told me that after several complaints by *sangathan* members who been monitoring the ration shops the situation had improved.

At this point Kamla arrived along with a friend from her slum, led by Savitri one of the community mobilisers from the *sangathan*. Savitri, like Anand, lives in Durga Camp

and had gone to pick the women from their homes in another slum settlement to make sure that they attended, something that it would not be appropriate for Anand to do as a man unknown to the women's families. Savitri is a strong middle aged woman with a loud voice, not afraid to give her opinion. She is proud of her lack of fear of officials, particularly the police and is happy to argue for what she considers her rights even though her approach can lack subtlety and sometimes puts peoples backs up. Originally from Jharkand, the new state carved out of Bihar in 2000, Savitri has a dramatic way of speaking and is given to rhetorical flourishes, but it is a skill useful for exhorting people to get involved with the *sangathan*. Kamla was a small young woman wearing a cheap nylon sari with the end worn modestly over her head, her friend stayed close to her and they were both quite shy and surprised at my presence. Apart from polite greetings they mostly remained very quiet, as did I, allowing ourselves to be led by Savitri and Anand in this unfamiliar space.

As everybody was there we went straight into the office. It was a large room lit by a south facing window but with corners mired in gloom, some of the window panes were broken and although there were ceiling fans the usual rattling air cooler was absent. There was no computer visible in the office but I could hear a printer working in a back room. Ragged edged cardboard files were piled on nearly all the surfaces and on the floor, as well as filling tall steel cupboards and dilapidated filing cabinets ranged around the walls. A desk and three steel frame chairs with white plastic wicker seats and backs were in front of the window. There were two officers present, perhaps in their late forties, and dressed in the uniform of the Delhi lower middle class man: a pair of trousers of suit cloth from a local tailor; a much laundered white shirt with a breast pocket bulging with daily necessities such as a pen, address book and small currency; and battered leather shoes. Neither had the well fed look of the middle class Delhiite and their apparent class position was reinforced by one of them giving off the distinctive smell that seeps from the pores after drinking cheap whiskey, perhaps from the night before.

One of the officers showed Anand to the chair behind the desk and directed Savitri and I to the other two chairs. He referred to Anand and Savitri respectfully, adding the honorific *ji* to their names. The atmosphere was of polite formality and while my presence was noted by the officers there seemed to be no problem with my attending. Anand told them that I was working with the *sangathan* and they did not ask about me again. The seating arrangement would leave Kamla and her friend standing in the dark by the door excluded from the discussion. This seemed wrong to me as the audit was being done in her name. I protested, trying to offer Kamla my chair so that she would be involved, but everybody insisted strongly that I sit and eventually as my refusal was stopping us from moving on I did so.

The officer asked for Kamla's ration card, she unwrapped it from the carefully folded plastic bag containing her documents and passed it over, via Savitri. The officer examined it and said that the card was too old and might not be valid anymore. Anand assured him that the card was valid and that they should check the records for the shop that had refused Kamla her rations. The officer looked at the address and said that the shop belonged to a different circle office and so we would have to go there to do the audit. Polite argument followed and he was persuaded to bring out the register that lists the ration card holders for circle office that we were in. The pages of the register were laminated A4 sheets, with each card number having the address and photograph of the holder. After some searching the card number was found and verified, next to a picture of Kamla's husband. We were in the correct office after all.

Kamla remained peripheral to this argument throughout. She provided information and confirmation when it was needed but it seemed doubtful whether it would have been possible for her to get anywhere with the officers on her own. Her deference coupled with illiteracy would seem to make it very difficult for her to find her way in the paper world of the office or challenge the officer's assertions on the basis of procedure without informed assistance⁶¹. Kamla's simple presence seemed to fulfil her role in events, the cardholder is necessary to begin the audit process but neither the officers nor

⁶¹ for more comment on this issue from other parts of India see (Corbridge et al. 2005, 32).

Anand and Savitri seemed to have any expectation of much further involvement from her. A certain level of education and familiarity with the documents to be interpreted are essential for the activist auditor as well as the officer.

One of the officers had ordered tea from the canteen and a young man brought three plastic cups for Anand, Savitri and I, but offered nothing to Kamla or her friend who remained standing near to the door. I was still a little uncomfortable at the way the room was arranged, with Anand and I sitting at the desk and Savitri sitting behind me. Perhaps I was over conscious of a need for Kamla to participate in the action. But at the same time Anand had introduced me as a member of the *sangathan* and I was also enjoying a satisfying feeling of identification and inclusion at being given a role in examining the documents that the officials started to produce.

Anand asked the officers to find the records for the shop that had refused Kamla rations. After some discussion they went to the back of the room and took down a large cardboard box from the top of one of the steel cabinets and dropped it onto the floor. Inside were a large number of tied plastic shopping bags containing papers and the officers tipped all of these onto the floor and started to rummage through the pile throwing unwanted packages back into the box. After some minutes they had still not found anything, Anand became impatient and said to Savitri '*plain paper de do*' (give me some plain paper). One of the provisions of the Right to Information Act 2005 is that an application can be written by hand on plain paper, obviating the need for departments to produce separate application forms and allowing flexibility and immediacy to someone composing an application. Part of the performative skill of the practised activist is the ability to compose an 'RTI' on the spot adapting it to the needs of the situation.

Savitri produced paper and pen from her plastic carrier bag and Anand started to write quickly. I asked Anand '*shikayat ya RTI?*' (complaint or RTI?), 'RTI' he replied. In this moment, with the officers still rummaging in the box, Anand was clearly using the RTI as means to hurry them up and assert his power in the situation, turning a polite

request into an official paper demand. He had only managed to write the first few lines when one of the officers succeeded in finding the records for the relevant shop and proffered them to ‘Anandji’. The first document was the stock register, the sheet showed dates, the opening and closing balances for ration stock and amounts sold, but with no mention of who the rations had been sold too. It also showed when the shop had been re-supplied, proof that the shop had received rations on a particular day, allowing the cardholder to contest assertions by the shop owner that rations had not yet arrived from the government warehouses. The second document was the daily sale register detailing the card number, type of ration and quantity issued, the amount received over time, the signature of the customer and the relation of the customer to the cardholder. This last part is crucial, a ration card will have a cardholder in whose name the card is issued but also gives the names of other members of the household who can use the card. These are listed in four columns, Name, Date of Birth, Fathers Name and Relation to Cardholder. Kamla’s card was in the name of her husband Mukesh Singh, and her name was below his along with three other family members. After some searching we found Kamla’s card number in the daily sale register, the most recent transaction showed that 25kg of wheat and 10kg of rice had been sold on the card, that over time 170kg of wheat and 90kg of rice had been sold, and the register was signed by ‘Premchand’ who in the next column claimed to be the cardholders ‘*Larka*’ (boy, meaning son). No corresponding entry had been made on Kamla’s card, in fact she had no record of receiving any ration for the last 5 years, and none of the family members on the card had the name Premchand.

For me seeing the fraud set out on paper was a significant moment after having heard so many stories relating to exactly this issue. The story is such a familiar one that *sangathans* inside and outside Delhi have developed precision guides to the method of investigating these and other common cases and produced similar pro-forma applications to those used at the Drive Against Bribe camp that only require the name of the applicant and details of card number, circle office etc. to be filled in (see example below).

Take Copies of Government Documents

To
The Public Information Officer
(Name of the Department)

Subject: Application under the Right to Information Act, 2005

If some ration or oil shopkeeper is not giving rations properly, you should conduct an audit of him by seeking his records. You should file an application under the Right to Information Act and ask for the following information from the Food Department.

Please give copies of the following registers for the months of (please specify the months here, for which you want the records) for shop No _____.

- a. Card Register
- b. Daily Sales register
- c. Inspection register
- d. Monthly stock register
- e. Daily stock register
- f. Copies of cash memos

After you receive these records, conduct a physical verification by speaking to card holders and matching the entries in their ration cards. On the basis of this verification, the "quantum of defalcation" (the number and amount of discrepancies found) should be calculated and a complaint should be made with the concerned Assistant Commissioner, Additional Commissioner and the Commissioner, to have the appropriate action taken against the shopkeeper.

(Proforma application produced by activists for use in applying for government records, with notes for users in italics (Kabir 2006). The procedure outlined is the one followed by Anand in the Food Supply Office)

The misappropriation of Kamla's ration seemed to be a very routine event in the light of similar stories. However what felt like a success and the end of a process of investigation, the truth revealed, was actually only the beginning of a longer process of complaint and RTI application that could take at best a month and might easily not lead to any result if Kamla or her family could not find the time or sustain the interest to follow the process up.

Having found the fraud Anand finished preparing the RTI application from earlier. This was addressed to the Public Information Officer of the FSO and written in the first person, as if from Kamla. It stated the shop number that Kamla's card belonged to and went on to request copies of the daily sale register, cash memo book and stock register from 1/01/2002 to 15/06/07. One of the officers produced an ink pad and Kamla put her thumb print at the bottom of the sheet next to where Anand had printed her name. On another sheet of paper Anand handwrote a *shikayat* (complaint) in Kamla's name to the Assistant Commissioner South-west Zone detailing our visit to the FSO and the discovery of the doctored daily sale register and asking that the offending *rationwalla* be punished. Kamla added her thumbprint to this as well.

I had taken out my camera to take pictures of the RTI application, the complaint and Kamla's ration card, and as the stock and daily sale registers of the ration shop were out on the desk I went to take some pictures of those as well. Savitri saw this and encouraged me to be quick before the officers noticed, I managed one picture of the page that showed the fraud but the officer had realised and complained angrily that the registers were government documents and that photographs were not allowed. I showed him the pictures that I had taken and he insisted that I delete the picture of the register, but not the complaint or RTI application. I got a conspiratorial smile from Savitri for my trouble.

The RTI application and the complaint were handed over to the officer and a receipt issued for them both. There was a brief query from the officer about whether a BPL card holder has to pay a fee to file an RTI and he was assured that as a BPL card holder

there would be no fee for Kamla either to file the RTI application or to receive photocopies of the records requested. I was still keen to get a copy of the daily sale register entries for my notes and so it seemed was Savitri as she gave me some plain paper on which to copy the figures, as soon as I had finished she whisked the paper away and slipped it back in to the plastic carrier bag she was carrying. I was not sure that I had done anything wrong by copying the figures, the documents were there in front of me and no one had questioned my taking notes at any other point. In any case a handwritten copy of the figures carries no legal weight, but Savitri seemed pleased that I had done the work for her, using my capability as an educated person to write at speed and get the work done.

The officers were both busy, one with filing the RTI and the other making a phone call to the *rationwalla* at Kamla's local shop to warn him that the audit had been done and a complaint made. This call potentially sets a different process in motion behind the bureaucratic one that we had just begun. The *rationwalla* knows where Kamla lives and could apply pressure or offer money to her family to withdraw the complaint or not follow up the first and second appeals in the RTI process if the information is not provided. Even though the *sangathan* workers may help to uncover frauds such as the one we had seen it is no guarantee that the people they help to complain will have the time or energy to follow through, particularly in the case of slum dwellers where an offer of money to withdraw a complaint may appear much more attractive in the short term than a drawn out grievance redressal process that may ultimately achieve nothing.

In the months after the audit I asked *sangathan* workers about Kamla's case several times, but did not get any more on the story. I had asked if she had faced any intimidation from the shop owner but was told that neither Savitri nor the other women working as community mobilisers for the *sangathan* had seen Kamla recently or heard about her case. On one occasion when I was going through the 'recent RTI' file at the *sangathan* office some months after the audit I found copies of the RTI and complaint that Anand had written for Kamla. I could still not find out if the case was being followed up. It was only when I came to write this story up in January 2008 that I asked

about Kamla again while internet chatting with Anita, an upper middle class young woman who started working with the *sangathan* after graduating from college in 2007. Anita wrote, ‘after audit, she started to get entitlements properly. No follow up with RTI as audit itself resulted in action’ (Personal communication, January 28th 2008). The RTI that Anita is referring to is not the one that Anand wrote for Kamla, but a potential subsequent ‘pending work’ RTI (like that filed by Faisal above) that might have been submitted if Kamla had not received her ration entitlement. It would seem that as with Faisal’s RTI at the passport office a satisfactory conclusion had been reached, without any further information on the case being offered or sought.

To sum up, I have provided an overview of the origins of the Right to Information campaign and an introduction to some of the strategies that activists in Delhi have developed to attempt to discipline the everyday state. We can see how transparency mechanisms such as Right to Information applications and public auditing of government records, if prepared or facilitated by skilled individuals, can produce results and ‘get work done’. The interrogation of bureaucratic processes, only possible because records are kept, *can* reveal the misuse of public funds, and in some individual cases, as with Kamla’s, perhaps discipline a government licensed businessman such as the *rationwalla* to carry out the duties of the license properly. Activists can offer many similar stories of individual success in using the Right to Information as evidence of its disciplinary potential. Stories in which officials have been made to behave, and to do the work that they have been tasked to do (see chapter 7).

However, we can also see how the everyday nature of the state endures in encounters such as the audit at the Food Supply Office. The advocacy and mediation of the *sangathan* members was essential in uncovering the long term embezzlement of Kamla’s rations, and it was their personal authority and knowledge about procedures and their local area that made the difference in the encounter. They had to know enough to negotiate the initial obstacles put up by the officials in the food supply office and to prepare the handwritten complaint and Right to Information application. Here we can

return to the distinction between *soochna* and *jaankaari*, and the idea of *jaankaari* as social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 243-252). As John Harriss notes, for Bourdieu ‘social capital is certainly not an attribute of ‘society’ as a whole, but is an aspect of the differentiation of classes, social capital in this view is an instrument of power’ (2001, 5). Despite the promise of rationality and a disciplined bureaucracy that transparency legislation, and the activists that promote it, offer, the government office remains a place in which work, including activist work, is played out through social encounters and negotiations, the drinking of tea and argumentation. The power relationship, the observing hierarchy, between the government officials and the *aam admi* (common man), or in Kamla’s case *aurat* (woman), has been altered by the introduction of legal mechanisms for transparency and accountability. However, at this early stage the disciplinary potential claimed for the Right to Information by its proponents, its intended use as a vehicle for instilling bureaucratic norms and empowering active citizens, perhaps remains more a rhetorical expression of a Foucaultian ideal type (Lukes, 2005: 98) of governmentality rather than an everyday reality. The ability to obtain *soochna* about how public funds are spent is clearly worth a great deal, but in the everyday work of an activist operating the levers of transparency and accountability it is social and cultural capital, realised as *jaankaari*, that achieves outcomes.

Chapter 6: Policy and Grassroots: Working Through Class, Gender and Space In The City

In the last chapter I introduced acquired social and cultural capital, expressed as *jaankaari* (practical knowledge/information) as a key factor in the everyday work of transparency and anti-corruption activists. We also saw, through the process that led up to the passing of the Right to Information Act 2005, how social networks activated by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) election win in 2004 allowed key individuals from the NCPRI high level access to the policy process, and to the drafting of the Act. During the campaign to get the Act passed, information about potential opposition or attempts to dilute the draft law were provided by friendly civil servants through the personal networks of NCPRI members. Allied to this the ability of the ‘stars’ of the NCPRI to call influential and sympathetic politicians to broker meetings with the Prime Minister allowed them to make interventions at the highest level at crucial moments. Even though activist involvement with the drafting of the Act was carried out through consultation with the wider Right to Information movement, the ability of those activists with high level access to operate at that level socially and intellectually, their social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 243-252), was essential to the success of the project.

Thus we can begin to see the role that the social, cultural, and to a lesser extent, economic capital that individuals possess, plays within the transparency and accountability activism scene in Delhi. Elements of these capitals such as social networks, educational qualifications, literacy and financial security that affect people’s positions, motivations and trajectories within the scene, are grounded in distinctions based on class, space and gender (Bourdieu 1984, 1985, 1989). The *jaankaari* (practical knowledge) that people gain from their work in the transparency and accountability activism scene, and the uses to which it is put are similarly affected by their social position. This chapter will pursue this idea by looking at the way that class, space and gender structure the day-to-day practice of the transparency activism *sangathan* (organisation) in South Delhi that we encountered in chapter 5. My focus on structure does not mean that *sangathan* workers lack agency. The group offers its members

opportunities to effect changes in their lives and to achieve successful outcomes, in their own terms. However, I would argue that this agency is limited by the social and spatial hierarchies in the city, structures that are reproduced in the everyday practice of the *sangathan*.

The *sangathan* belongs to what is popularly called ‘civil society’⁶² in India. The contemporary social scene with its roots in the expression of the hope for a new form of grassroots non-party political process that grew out of the anti-emergency struggles of the late 1970s (Omvedt 1993, 190; Kamat 2002, 12-13). The philosophical roots of the civil society scene in India are embedded in ideas of local action and *loksatta* (people’s power), led by social movements and NGOs who claim the moral imperative to protect civil liberties (Goody 2001, 153). Thus ‘civil society’ works as an indigenous concept (Jenkins 2001, 251) in India as well as reflecting the fact that in recent years it has become the ‘‘aspirational shorthand’ in international development policy making for ideas of equity, participation and public fairness’ (Elliott 2003, 3). I do not wish to rehearse here the arguments about whether civil society is a separate sphere from the state, or whether it can be built up or fostered. I have already argued the state and society cannot be separated out from one another and would follow Chandoke when she notes that;

‘though we tend to divide spheres of human interaction into segments, and though we accept that human beings act in different ways in different segments, we need to register that these spheres are mutually constitutive of each other. For this reason it is argued that civil society is only ambiguously the source of democratic activism, for we are likely to discover in this sphere structures of power that tie up with the state’ (2003, 260)

As Steven Sampson notes the idea of ‘Civil Society as an autonomous social activity coexists with ‘civil society’ as a discursive field and as a structure of resources’ (1996, 142), it is the latter which I am concerned with here. Just as the state can be

⁶² For a taste of this ‘civil society’ scene in India see the monthly English language magazine ‘Civil Society’ at <http://www.civilsocietyonline.com/> (accessed 7th June 2010) which offers news about social issues, NGOs, social movements, the environment and corporate social responsibility.

encountered in its material forms (see chapter 1), so ‘civil society’ can be encountered as NGO workers or *sangathan* offices and in flows of resources.

Thus however intellectually disputed or ‘slack’ civil society might be as a concept (Chandoke 2003, 239; Jenkins 2001, 250) the civil society *scene* has become an important site through which ideas about non party political, participatory and secular ‘active citizenship’, in other words about certain forms of modernity, are reproduced (Jayaram 2005, 7:22). But, as we shall see, viewed through the lens of class, space and gender in Delhi we might also discover a more Gramscian reading of civil society, as a site in which some forms of hegemony are maintained and reproduced rather than broken down (Femia 2001, 139; Kamat 2002, 31).

Rob Jenkins (2007) and Amita Baviskar (2010) have pointed out the success of groups such as *Parivartan* and the MKSS at producing effective alliances between the middle classes and the rural and urban poor. However, their research does not bring out the fine detail of how class, space and gender might play out within such an alliance, or reveal the life histories or motivations of individuals working within it. Thus my aim here is to explore the way that an organisation works through these differences highlighting both class distinctions and interconnections. To do this I will address the questions: How are class and gender relationships revealed in the practice of a transparency and accountability activist group? What role do these factors play in the life of the activism scene? And, how is participation in the ‘open and secular’ associations of ‘civil society’ (Beteille, 2005: 283, 284) that make up the activist scene affected by the delineation of social space in Delhi, and the class positions, gender and aspirations of the people that inhabit those spaces?

I begin by providing an overview of the personnel and organisation of the *sangathan* as it was during my fieldwork, before going on to look at individual members in more detail.

The South Delhi Sangathan: The Distinction between ‘Policy’ and the ‘Grassroots’.

The *sangathan* first began work in 2003. It is registered as an NGO with the government which would entitle it to tax exemptions but as far as I could ascertain the registration was effectively dormant and the group actually operates as a ‘citizens’ movement’ receiving no institutional funding. It was conceived by a group of upper middle class women based in south Delhi: Aditi, Veena, Yashica and Simrita, identified in *sangathan* literature as members of the ‘core group’. Two of the women, Aditi and Veena, had volunteered with groups involved in the transparency and accountability activist scene in the city and wanted to extend the use of the Right to Information as an anti-corruption tool in the south of the city. All four of the women have professional backgrounds either in the NGO, development, academic and legal sectors and have studied development or social policy to postgraduate degree level at leading universities in the UK. By the time I encountered the group Veena had moved to Mumbai, but was still closely associated with its work, making visits when she returned to Delhi. Through Aditi’s part time lecturing work at an elite ladies college of Delhi University some young upper middle class volunteers had been recruited, Tanika and Anita, both students of journalism. Tanika had graduated and was working full time at an international NGO focused on the role of women in conflict management. Anita was in her final year of study and started to work full time for the *sangathan* after she had finished her degree in 2007.

These upper middle class and university educated members of the group are mostly focused on what is called ‘policy work’. This involves devising campaigns and writing publicity literature in English, contributing pieces about the group to English language newspapers, doing research in archives and on the internet, writing funding proposals and analysing information gained through Right to Information applications. The work of managing relationships with the media, with national campaigns on the Right to Information, and with actual and potential donors is done at this level of the group. Of the upper middle class core group it is only Aditi, Simrita and Anita that attend weekly meetings or are particularly visible at the grassroots level. The daily practice of policy work is not particularly easy to observe as an ethnographic researcher. It takes place in

private homes where access is extremely limited and may concern potentially sensitive subjects such as the organisation of funding. My knowledge of this area of the *sangathan* is therefore limited to what members chose to tell me in interview or when projects were completed and the results presented at a public meeting. The day-to-day work in the public sphere of the 'grassroots' *karyakarte* (social workers) however is easier to follow.

At the grassroots level the *sangathan* works out of two offices located less than two hundred metres from each other. The first is the *Soochna Ghar* (Information Centre) briefly described in Chapter 5, a converted garage space in a block of middle class DDA housing. The second is a rented three room basement space beneath a shop in a market area across a quiet residential street from the *Soochna Ghar*. Both offices are less than 200 metres from the entrance to Durga Camp, the slum *basti* where, with one exception, the grassroots workers of the *sangathan* live. These are Anand, essentially the day-to-day manager at the grassroots level, and four 'community mobilisers', three women from Durga Camp, Savitri, Padma and Shalini, and Lalit, and a man from a smaller *jugghi* cluster nearby. Lalit's involvement was uncertain during my time with the group. He had returned to his home village in Rajasthan for a month without requesting leave and as a result had lost his formal role as a community mobiliser, although he still attended the office and meetings in the hope of getting it back. Both offices are in relatively neutral public spaces to which access is possible for anyone. This would not be the case were they placed either within the boundary of Durga Camp or, as many professional NGO offices are, in an upper middle class colony.

The group organises two meetings a week, one on a Wednesday morning in the basement office and another on a Friday morning at a community centre on the edge of Ferozepur a large low income area about a kilometre away. In preparation for both meetings it is the job of the community mobilisers to go to nearby slums and let people know that the meeting is taking place. Often they will collect particular people that have been identified as having a problem with which the *sangathan* might be able to help, and these people will often bring friends along to the meeting. Sometimes the

mobilisers will work through existing networks of friends or relatives to organise meetings. Anand will usually travel to the meeting independently using his motorbike. Because the community mobilisers utilise female networks most of those attending the meetings are women, although men do attend.

On days when meetings are not taking place the grassroots workers take turns in staffing the offices, particularly the easily locatable *Soochna Ghar*. Clients, both male and female, come with work to be expedited, in most cases involving government paperwork. In simple cases this may be no more than asking for help to fill in a form correctly. In others it will be to prepare complaints about state officials and where appropriate *sangathan* workers will suggest using the Right to Information Act to access data or prompt a bureaucratic response.

The capacity of the grassroots workers to assist in these cases varies. As we saw in chapter 5 Anand is well practiced at preparing government forms and writing RTI applications or official complaints on particular subjects. The other community mobilisers, while technically literate, are much less confident with written Hindi. Thus they may accompany clients to government offices and mediate for them, or bring them to the office to meet Anand, or if Anand is away call him on the phone to find out when he will return. Minding the office may be left to the most junior or least literate *sangathan* workers who will often ask clients to wait for Anand. On some occasions minding the office for an hour or so was even left to me and my research assistant. The *Soochna Ghar* also occasionally acts as an informal labour exchange for family members and associates of the community mobilisers. Middle class people from the flats in which the garage is situated sometimes come to ask if the grassroots workers can call someone from the *basti* to perform a service for them such as washing a car, sweeping, or driving a car for a couple of hours.

Thus we can see that the *sangathan* includes people from both ends of Delhi's social spectrum, and functions as a coalition across social classes as Jenkins (2007) and Baviskar (2010) note for other groups in the Right to Information scene, but we also

see that the coalition works *through* class differences. The different members of the *sangathan* take on the tasks appropriate to their education and skills, working for policy or at the grassroots, but these tasks are to a great extent determined by the social and cultural capital attached to class and, at the grassroots, by gender. It true that different people in the group have different capacities and skills, and can access different social worlds and spaces in the city to the group's overall advantage; however, this dichotomy between the 'policy' and 'grassroots' levels of the *sangathan* is produced by working with the grain of inequality in the city rather than against it.

With this in mind it is worth exploring further the need for the *sangathan's* upper middle class 'core group' to find gatekeepers for the work in the slums. With the exception of Veena, now based in Mumbai, all are residents of 'posh colonies' in the south of the city a few kilometres from Durga Camp. In many ways Durga Camp and these colonies are stereotypical of the social divide in south Delhi. The slum housing the *chote log* (little people) working in the informal economy, and the colonies housing the *bare log* (big people), the business, media and bureaucratic elites. The division might also be seen as a microcosm of the nation with its increasingly high profile and wealthy middle class living alongside, and serviced by, the 'India of the 88%' (Harriss-White 2003, 72).

As outlined in chapter 2 relationships between colony and slum, such as finding casual labour, are mediated by slum dwellers already working in the colonies or through informal labour markets where labourers carrying their tools gather on the roadside waiting to be hired by the day. The relationship between slums and the colonies is one of economic interdependence, but there is also distrust, with many colony dwellers perceiving the slums as a threat to middle class decency, health and security (Tarlo 2003, 14; Froystad 2006, 162-164; Dickey 2000, 462), an attitude of which the community mobilisers are well aware.

These understandings of class, space and difference in the city mean that the members of the upper middle class 'core group' of the *sangathan* who regularly attend meetings,

despite their willingness to sit down with people from the slums and spend time poring over problems, always retain their status as *bare log* (big people), whether they might wish to or not. In fact it is partly their status as *bare log*, their potential connectedness, that persuades some of the group's poorer clients that they might 'get their work done' through the *sangathan*⁶³. Their very presence at *sangathan* meetings can draw extra people in. On one occasion in a meeting, led by Aditi, Uzma, my research assistant, was sitting behind two girls discussing how one of them could get to speak to Aditi in order to get a recommendation for a job. The meeting was too busy and the girls, realising that they would not get to speak to Aditi and not much interested in her lecture on the uses of the Right to Information Act, left early (Fieldnotes, 21st February 2007).

The *sangathan*'s stated reason for existence is to 'empower individuals to fight corruption and the arbitrary exercise of power and to participate in the effective utilisation of public funds'. To assist people to gain their rights as Indian citizens vis a vis the state by working with both 'low income settlements and middle income colonies' (quotes from *sangathan* publicity material). The work of the group is framed by meta-narratives of citizenship and 'participation', the polysemous nature of which allows contributions to the group by different members, from different social backgrounds, to suggest empowerment, local agency and social change (Mosse 2005, 160).

However, class identities, fundamentally concerned with seeing oneself in relation to others, are not easily discarded. The *sangathan* workers from Durga Camp are conscious of how some better off people in the city might stigmatise them as *gande log* (dirty people) and remain sensitive about their position. On several occasions Padma, one of the community mobilisers asked me what I thought about Durga Camp and the people that lived there, about whether I thought that they are dirty or whether I minded the smell of the *nullah*. I had always assured her that I thought nothing bad about them

⁶³ Baviskar outlines a similar effect to this in her work on *adivasi* activism in the Narmada valley, Madhya Pradesh. She describes a distinction between educated outsider "activists" and *adivasis* (forest dwelling tribal people) within a *sanghat* (grassroots activist organisation). The outsider activists handle media connections, funding proposals and soliciting the goodwill of the English speaking intelligentsia in the major metropolises (1995, 188-191).

but she had seemed doubtful. Similarly the community mobilisers were conscious of the willingness of upper middle class members of the group to visit the slums and spend time with them. Criticism was expressed to me by the Durga Camp workers for one member of the core group who preferred to stay away from weekly meetings and work on ‘policy’ matters. Their perception was that she was absent because she did not want to have contact with ‘*chote log*’ and that perhaps she thought that people from the *basti* were dirty (fieldnotes, 5th July 2007). She expressed the situation differently, telling me that she had been very busy, and travelling, with her formal employment and anyway saw her most suitable role as working with the case studies that the grassroots work of the group produced, interacting with the media and concerning herself with policy ideas and proposals for funding (interview 24th August 2007). Equally the grassroots workers were approving of members of the core group that they felt came down to their level and showed a concern for their situation (fieldnotes, 5th July 2007).

I do not want to give the impression that the grassroots workers of the *sangathan* see themselves as inferior to the upper middle class members of the group. They take considerable pride in their toughness and ability to live and work in the heat of the summer without ‘AC’ (air conditioning) and in the open air. They contrast themselves with *amir log* (rich people), who are seen as weak and unable last without AC or a car to travel in. Sitting with Anand one day in the *soochna ghar* he rolled up his sleeve to show me the difference in colour between his forearms and his hands, tanned from riding his motorbike for work. He asked how rich volunteers could do this work when they would not go out in the sun (*doop*) and need ‘*bara gunte ke AC*’ (12 hours of air conditioning) every day. Furthermore he asserted that as policy is developed from case studies produced at the grassroots, then how can policy be made without grassroots work? And that if this is the case then people working at the grassroots should be valued, and paid, equally to those working on policy (field notes 5th July 2007).

The upper middle class core group’s status as *bare log* means that the slum world is as closed to them as the guarded gate of a colony house might be to a slum dweller without some help to gain access. Casual visits by outsiders are not particularly

welcome in a *basti* such as Durga Camp and can be seen as a threat where people may have illegal connections to power and water supplies, unauthorised businesses or be investing scarce resources in making illegal additions to houses that can be rented out for extra income. The upper middle class women in the *sangathan* recognise that their project to encourage the use of the right to information act and gain accountability from local officials must be mediated through contacts in the slums, and that, according to good development practice, the agendas that the *sangathan* tries to address should ideally be determined by its clients. To a great extent they are, as evidenced by the often noisy meetings in which people come to present and discuss a variety of grievances. The meetings also have an educational purpose. *Sangathan* members with their *jaankaari* about the paper processes of the state inform those attending about how to access their rights, but also attempt to teach people different, more disciplined and disciplining, ways of engaging with the representatives of the state that they might encounter.

Teaching Women to be Civil? The Sangathan Meeting as a Gendered and Hierarchical Space.

During the course of my fieldwork I attended many of the Wednesday meetings in the basement office space and those on Fridays at the Ferozepur community centre. Some were busier than others depending on whether there was a particular deadline for government applications, or perhaps when religious observance or periods of fasting prevented some from attending. Here I will describe a “typical” meeting assembled from examples in my field notes.

My research assistant and I arrive for the meeting, a five minute auto-rickshaw ride from my home, around 11am. There might already be 5 or 10 people in the room sitting on mats on the floor discussing their cases with one of the *sangathan* workers. Often this is with one of the female community mobilisers who have been out in Durga Camp and neighbouring slums calling on people to come to the meeting. An old sofa cushion

big enough for one person lies on the floor at the centre of the back wall of the room. Anand is sitting on the cushion and discussing cases with those attending, looking at forms, and writing Right to Information applications and complaints to different departments where necessary.

As the room begins to fill up the majority of those attending are women although there would usually be one or two men present not including Anand or myself. It is notable that the meeting is predominantly a female space but this cannot be explained away by suggesting that women simply have more time to attend. Many are grabbing some time between domestic duties at home. Some women doing domestic work in nearby middle class colonies have several jobs but might attend during quieter periods of the day. Clients attending the *sangathan* offices with problems outside of weekly meetings would often be male and so female participation in the weekly meetings would seem to be the result of social networks built up by the female community mobilisers.

Sangathan literature makes no claim to the group having a gender focus, speaking only of empowering ‘residents’ and ‘individuals’, however when Savitri talks about the early days of her position as a *sangathan* mobiliser she refers to recruiting new members in these terms; ‘*me ne auraton ko jodna shurur kiya*’ (literally “I started adding women”) (interview, 7th March 2007). This gendered networking was brought home to me at a meeting that the *sangathan* organised in Sangam Vihar, a newly built lower middle class colony on the outskirts of south Delhi, some way from the group’s usual area of operations. The meeting was held in the house of a woman, Sheela, whose family had been living in a *jugghi* cluster close to Durga Camp but had bought a plot of land in Sangam Vihar and built a house. Sheela is a friend of Savitri and Padma’s and had gathered a group of her female neighbours together to hear the *sangathan* workers’ pitch in a meeting led by Anand. The meeting seemed as much a social gathering, and a chance for Savitri and Padma to have a look at Sheela’s new house, as it was an example of burgeoning transparency activism.

The gendered nature of the weekly meetings partly reflects a discourse within Indian development practice that has promoted *Mahila Mandals* (women's groups) as important sites of female empowerment and drivers of local social change (Batliwala and Dhanraj 2007, 23; Omvedt 1993, 97; Luthra 2003, 254-255). At one point the *sangathan* did organise a *Mahila Mandal* meeting on Tuesdays, but if this was still in existence during my fieldwork I was not aware of it. Savitri told me that she had been 'president' of the group and Padma 'vice-President', but that her work with the *sangathan* no longer allowed her the time to spare (interview 7th March 2007). However, the spirit of the *Mahila Mandal* did survive. On some occasions, particularly when senior upper middle class members of the *sangathan* were not attending and keeping the discussion on track, the weekly meeting topic would drift away from governance, transparency and accountability to issues that directly affected women, in particular domestic violence.

At its height the meeting might have around 25 or 30 people, although on one occasion when a new campaign was being announced and journalists were attending I counted 50 (field notes, February 21st 2007). The meeting is led by Anand until the arrival of either Aditi or Simrita, sometimes both. If Aditi or Simrita arrive then Anand will politely offer his seat on the cushion to one of them. The busiest part of the meeting runs for perhaps an hour and a half until the business at hand has come to a natural conclusion or the central players have to leave. As people start to leave, the meeting reverts to its earlier state of a few people sitting and finishing their business. One of the community mobilisers makes tea and opens a packet of biscuits, and one or two people with sufficient spare time might stay to drink tea and gossip while any paperwork the meeting has produced is filed and the register of attendance completed.

In its publicity literature the *sangathan* is framed as 'non-hierarchical' (from a *sangathan* publicity pamphlet in English, undated). In everyday *sangathan* practice hierarchy is consciously negated by using polite forms of address between all participants such as the formal *aap* (you), rather than the informal *tum*, or adding the honorific *ji* to all names; by sitting at floor level; or, for the upper middle class

participants, by dressing simply and modestly in neutral styles such as the *salwar kameez*, plain shirt and trousers, or sometimes, more evocatively, in *khadi*⁶⁴. But inevitably class identities continue to be played out through differences in style, habitus, voice, social and spatial mobility and linguistic versatility and are not erased by the performance of equality. Thus in a *sangathan* meeting the focus is directed inward to the speaker with the most authority, which usually will be the easily identified *bare log* (big people) in the room. The ability of Aditi or Simrita to bring the room to order by raising their voices or clapping their hands to gain attention only confirms this. In their absence the authority transfers to Anand, but in a form tempered by familiarity.

The focus of the meeting would change from week to week, but nearly always with the same background theme. That is the promotion of a particular model of political action through which to present grievances on a wide range of issues such as the public distribution system (PDS), basic sanitation, education, *bijli/paani* (water and electricity supplies), and complaints against the police or other government departments. The aim of the meeting would be to persuade people to use existing grievance channels backed up by social auditing using the Right to Information Act. This might involve a lecture from Aditi, Simrita or Anand on the uses of the Act and how it might be applied in cases such as the withholding of rations or gaining admission for slum children to good local schools. Sometimes it would be as simple as getting those assembled to repeat the phrase '*Soochna ka Adhikar do hazaar panch*' (Right to Information 2005), almost in the form of a *mantra*, to be used when confronted with recalcitrant officials (field notes, May 31st 2006; June 29th 2007). On occasion the meeting would showcase long term work that the *sangathan* had been carrying out and findings would be presented to the audience. The data used to support these findings would have been collected through research and Right to Information requests made in the names of *sangathan* members,

⁶⁴ I am not suggesting that upper middle class members of the *sangathan* dress ostentatiously when not attending meetings. *Khadi* is the hand woven cloth, mostly cotton, silk or wool, popularised by Gandhi as a symbol of Indian self reliance, simplicity and equality, and intended as a rejection of the English mill produced cloth goods imported to India during the colonial period. *Khadi* is produced by cooperatives and sold as plain cloth and finished goods across India through a network of central and state level 'emporiums'. It has become the typical dress of politicians, but also signifies activism and has taken on fresh meaning for anti-globalisation activists in India as a symbol of the rejection of globalised mass production.

but the data analysis would be done by those working at the policy level of the group. Sometimes the findings might prompt anger amongst those attending, as one campaign to obtain the records of funds spent by councillors on local amenities did. But angry reactions from women attending the meeting and calls to picket the councillors offices or physically attack them would be met by assertions from those leading the meeting that it was the lack of transparency in the system that was the problem rather than the councillors themselves, and instead of making personal accusations the system should be monitored by citizen's groups such as the *sangathan* (Field notes February 21st 2007).

In this vein requests for people to engage with rational procedures rather than appealing directly to political representatives would be made, such as this one from Simrita in a meeting about the quality of food rations supplied by the local PDS shops⁶⁵;

Simrita (to the meeting): we can't rush to the Chief Minister for everything [...] Why do we tend to forget the basics? (Savitri passes a sample of PDS grain to Simrita which she holds out to the meeting). What is the meaning of this sample? Is it just there for show? Or should one get the same type of things? The law says that one should get the same type of ration. You people should complain if you are not getting the same quality, and in writing! (Translated from spoken Hindi in field notes by Kamal Misra, June 20th 2007)

When Simrita, an internationally educated human rights lawyer, refers to 'the basics' she is asking people to follow legal and bureaucratic procedure to make *individual* complaints and cases which, by being written, will become documentary evidence in a process of accountability. She is arguing a case for participation in what Chatterjee describes as 'the well structured principled and constitutionally sanctioned relations between the state and individual members of civil society' (2001, 178). This is a depoliticised, or at least anti-political, civil society as it might be understood by 'policy advisors at the World Bank in their arguments about 'good governance'' (Harriss 2005b, 4), the civil society that the Anglophone middle class 'activists' that John

⁶⁵ The Food Supply Office have to supply samples for comparison with the grain that the PDS shops are supplying so that people can ensure that they are getting the correct quality.

Harriss spoke to in Chennai contrast to the ‘dirty river’ of party politics (Harriss 2005c, Harriss 2005b, 1, Harriss 2006, 462-463)⁶⁶.

However, in considering the effect of social class, gender and space in the city on the operation of the *sangathan* we should also keep the everyday state and society in mind. One of the key services that groups such as the *sangathan* offer to their clients is *jaankaari*, the knowledgeable mediation of the *dalaal* (broker). Many of those that come to the *sangathan* for assistance are not literate and therefore unable to engage directly with bureaucratic paper work. Thus part of the legitimacy of a group such as the *sangathan* rests in its potential to act as a ‘big man’ might, a benefactor who can make things happen (Mines 1994, 35-36; Berenschot 2009) and get work done. Occasionally this role would lead to clients being disappointed when *sangathan* workers refused to help them bend the rules, for instance by falsifying an income certificate that would allow them to get a red *antodyaya* ration card (field notes 27th June 2007). Even though it may not be the intention of the upper middle class core group that started the *sangathan*, when viewed using ‘quotidian forms of political common sense’ (Hansen 1999, 137) this is how the *sangathan* is understood by many of those that look to it as a problem solving mechanism (Harriss 2005a, 1043). For the ordinary people from slums such as Durga Camp who attend the *sangathan* meetings, as well as those who work for the *sangathan*, connections outside of the slum, potential new routes of mediation with the state system are valuable, providing possibilities previously unavailable to them and at reduced moral and financial risk than attempting to use a *dalaal* (middle man).

This idea of the *sangathan* as a zone of opportunity applies as much to the full time members of the group as it does to the *sangathan*’s clients, and particularly to the grassroots workers. As part of an association of ‘concerned citizens’ the *sangathan*

⁶⁶ I am not suggesting that the middle classes possess a civic sense that other inhabitants of the city do not. The widespread unauthorised or illegal uses of land and natural resources and power in the city clearly shows that good civic behaviour does not attach to a particular class of people, whatever some middle class groups in the city might believe. See Dipankar Gupta’s ‘Mistaken Modernity’ (2000) and Pavan Varma’s ‘The Great Indian Middle Class’ (1998) for popular discussions of this issue.

members from the informal working classes are also to some extent its clients. This realisation can inform our understanding of why people get involved with a group like the *sangathan* and what difference involvement makes to their lives. I will explore these issues further through a series of case studies of some of those working for the *sangathan*, beginning at the grassroots with Anand, a pivotal figure in the group.

Anand.

Anand is unmarried and in his mid twenties. He has lived in Durga Camp since he was 4 years old. His father had come to Delhi from Uttar Pradesh to look for work in the 1970's and once established had brought the family to settle in Durga Camp. Anand is thoughtful and serious, seemingly older than his years, and careful in his words. His position in the *sangathan* is unofficially that of the day to day manager of grassroots operations for which he receives about Rs.6500 a month. In Durga Camp, where a household may be living on a combined income of around Rs.2500-3000 per month, Rs.6500 for one salary is not inconsiderable. He pools some of his income with his family, telling me '*khana ek hi juggah banta hai*' (lit: we make food in one place) (field recording and notes, February 24th 2007) and also has access to an old but serviceable 150cc Honda Passion motorbike which he uses to get around south Delhi in his daily work.

Anand is also remarkable in Durga Camp for having studied to degree level. He graduated with a BA (Hons) in Geography (Hindi medium) from BS College of Delhi University. In Durga Camp this marks him as an educated man, as a member of the *padhe-likhe log* (people that can read and write), his skills enable him to work for the *sangathan* and confer status on him as someone capable of interpreting the government *khaghaz* (documents/papers) that are so important in the lives of the slum dwellers. The bulk of Anand's work for the *sangathan* involves helping people deal with low level representatives of the state on day to day issues. Whether it is writing a complaint or a Right to Information application (RTI) for a person facing problems with welfare provision, knowing the correct procedure to be followed in making applications and

dealing with officials so that people can avoid becoming confused or misled, or interacting with municipality officials and political representatives when local services such as the borewell fail or the Durga Camp *nullah* has become blocked and needs to be cleaned out. In all of this work it is his *jaankari* about local structures, power, connections and possibilities, gathered over time, which enables Anand to operate.

Anand first met Aditi in 2000 when he was in ‘12th class’, the last year of high school. They were introduced by one of his teachers. Anand told me that it was unusual for people in Durga Camp to study to 12th class and that he used to help people from the slum with filling government forms even before he had left school. Aditi had employed him to do surveys on sanitation for a research project that she was running in Durga Camp. He got 10 rupees for each survey filled, going door to door. His work had been good and Aditi had asked him if he would like to be involved if she could find more work like this. He went on to do survey work in a *basti* in Murnirka, a nearby area of south Delhi. After the Murnirka work had finished he didn’t see Aditi for three years, until after he had completed his BA graduation. Then in November 2003 she had contacted him and asked if he wanted to join a new *sangathan* and help her to set up an information centre to tell people about the Right to Information act⁶⁷. Although at the time Anand knew nothing about the Right to Information, Aditi said that she’d pay him for the work. The *sangathan* has a rather long and unwieldy name and, remembering the moment when he and Aditi first opened the information centre, Anand laughed and said ‘I got this big board outside and I used to wonder that the name is so big but there’s nobody in here’ (Translated from field notes, July 5th 2007).

This was not the first time that Anand had been involved with an organisation doing ‘social service’. From the age of 15 he had been a member of the local branch of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS)⁶⁸. Anand told me how he became involved;

⁶⁷ At this time it was the state level ‘Delhi Right to Information Act (2001)’ that the group was promoting, superseded by the Central Right to Information Act (2005).

⁶⁸ The RSS is a highly influential Hindu nationalist organisation, the ideological force behind the *Sangh Parivar* (RSS Family) of religious pressure groups, labour unions and political parties committed to *Hindutva* (Hinduness/Hindu way of life) and opposed to an idea of a secular India. The basic RSS unit is the local *shakha* (branch) which meets daily, gathering together members,

‘In the *basti*, RSS people used to come wearing “knickers” (shorts) and used to talk to people. My elder brother and a friend of his, they used to take people to a park where we used to play, sing some songs, did some exercise and came back, so this is how there was a kind of *anushasan* (discipline) of which we were made aware. They used to say, we should live with *anushasan*, talk nicely to people, and use ‘ji’ whether talking to young or old, so I really liked it, that they give *shiksha* (education) to people on how to behave. My elder brother also used to go for it so I started going as well. We used to get some exercise and also a chance to spend time with friends, then started going for camps too.’ (Translated from interview recording by Kamal Mishra and Martin Webb, July 5th 2007)

Anand’s introduction to discipline and equality seems to have made a strong impression on him, providing him with a moral framework, and a group within which to explore the ideas that he was discovering. The RSS also provides a framework for leadership and personal development. Anand fitted in well, first being given the task of organising an evening youth *shakha* in the *basti* and over the next two years, and after three training courses Anand told us that he came to be a *tarun prabhar* (youth leader – like a class monitor) for 7 *shakha* of the local youth, from 12-25 years old (Interview July 5th 2007),

Although Anand did well he started to become unhappy with the divisive ideology of the RSS, and what he perceived as the hypocrisy of the local leadership; however, the contacts he had made there proved to be essential in securing a better place at university;

‘I had got 67% in my (class) 12th, and I got through (admission) in three colleges, but in those I was getting B.A. pass and I wanted either Political Science Honours or Geography Honours. There is this person Sanjayji who has been with RSS throughout, he is the head of whole of South Delhi. So, he asked me about my plans, and I told him. He said, ‘we have a teacher who is with RSS so I will speak to him’. So, I got admission in Geography Hons. Where cut-off was 72% that year in that course, still I

particularly boys and young men, for physical exercise and to listen to ideological sermons. A *shakha* is meant to bring together Hindus of all castes and classes to represent the Hindu ‘ethnic nation’ in miniature (Jaffrelot, 2005: 2-3). When attending the *shakha* members are supposed to wear the easily identified uniform of the RSS, a white shirt and brown shorts.

got it. The geography department of BS is very different from the rest of the college. At least 3 teachers were in RSS there, so I benefited. After 2002 I left RSS, my heart was not in it, as I started understanding things. Even in their lectures in class these teachers used to say, we should all be proud Indians, learn Sanskrit, drink *Nimbu-pani* (lemon water), ban colas, etc. I asked them where their kids study. They are in US; they must be drinking Pepsi Cola and eating burgers there...I started drifting away from RSS, but I still get messages whenever any big event comes up, for organizing things, etc. I go there sometimes. In today's age it is very important to have contacts and money is important too. For people of 'lower middle class' like us one can only move ahead in life either through money or contacts.' (Translated from interview recording by Kamal Mishra and Martin Webb, July 5th 2007)

It seemed odd to me at the time that Anand identified himself as lower middle class, he lives in a slum *basti* and in considerably more crowded conditions than other self identifying lower middle class informants I had spoken to. According to some assessments based on consumption the lower middle class are

'those who live in either LIG or Janata flats or kattcha-pucca mix houses and have at least two among the following assets – scooter, refrigerator, telephone, colour or black and white TV, radio.' (Kumar, 2004)

On this basis Anand's two room brick house, his motorbike, and the colour TV, on which he enjoys watching the Hindi news channels and Cartoon Network (fieldnotes, December 9th 2006) seems to qualify him. But, compared to most states in India, Delhi is affluent and performs better than average according to measures such as the Human Development Index (Shiva Kumar and Govt. of NCT of Delhi, 2006: 16-18). If Anand is lower middle class as he asserts then it is only in very broad comparison, and assuming a very broad definition of the middle class. For Sridharan (2004);

'There is a large "aspirational" middle class beyond the economically defined middle class, particularly among the young of all castes and classes. [...] they aspire to leave their humble class origins behind and therefore identify with classes, social groups, parties and policies that seem to promise upward mobility' (2004: 424)

Anand is certainly aspirational in this respect, his claim to membership of the middle class is symbolic rather than factual (Deshpande, 2003: 136). In conversations about politics he told me that he remained in contact with the local *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) workers, even though he had lost interest in the ideological stance of the RSS. His work with the *sangathan* also connects him to the left leaning upper middle class elite and their links with government and the international civil society scene. The legal awareness training that he has accessed through the *sangathan* has encouraged him to apply for an LLB. (Bachelor of Law) by correspondence course, and he continues to apply for secure lower grade government positions where he hopes that his knowledge of the Right to Information Act will help him if a question on it comes up in the entrance examinations. (Interview, July 5th 2007)

Anand is attempting to keep his options open and is willing to move on from the *sangathan*, but at the same time he is aware that it is his connections, first to the RSS and then to the *sangathan*, that are offering him the opportunity to move ahead. Although he became disenchanted with the politics of the RSS, and even describes himself as *nastik* (atheist) (field notes 19th July 2007), the ideas of service, discipline and moral correctness that originally attracted him to it remained with him, making him well suited to the work that the *sangathan* does. The fact that Anand maintained links with his old RSS network while cementing new ties to the RTI movement suggests that the ideological animosity between groups in the ‘non-party left’ (Kamat 2002, 31) sections of the Right to Information scene and the Hindu right wing⁶⁹ means little to him. He has a particular ‘sighting’ (Corbridge et al. 2005, 9) of the activist scene and his concerns lie with micro politics, with everyday relationships. In this he remains pragmatic, conscious that contacts are essential and that they have been built up over ten years of hard work.

⁶⁹ For example see the highly critical volume of essays by authors writing from a Hindu nationalist perspective edited by Rajan and Kak: (2006) *NGOs, Activists and Foreign Funds: Anti-Nation Industry*, published by Vigil Public Opinion Forum in Chennai. Some activists in the Right to Information scene in Delhi would refer to it as ‘that book’.

Anand's work to build up connections outside of the slum also had an effect on his standing within the slum. In late 2005 it was decided that an election for the post of *pradhan* (chief)⁷⁰ of Durga Camp would be held. Anand had been working for the *sangathan* for almost two years and despite his youth, he was 23 at the time, his friends and family had suggested that he stand in the election. He had started to campaign using "Book" as his election symbol⁷¹ to drive home the point that he is an educated man, in contrast to the other candidates (field notes 18th September 2007). Anand was very proud to have been nominated at such a young age and apparently fought a 'clean' campaign, not compromising himself by connecting to a political party in order to gain funds to buy votes. I was told that Anand won by 243 votes (fieldnotes, September 5th 2007) and it was clearly a very important moment for him personally, and as a validation that the work that he had been doing had encouraged people to vote for a clean candidate.

However, when they found out what he was doing the upper middle class core group of the *sangathan*, while wishing him well, said that if he won the election then he would have to give up his job as they felt that he must be seen to be impartial, could not devote sufficient time to his work and that being *pradhan* might force him to make political and moral compromises (Interviews, August 7th, 24th and September 23rd 2007). Initially Anand stood down from the *sangathan* but after two months he found the job of *pradhan* unsustainable and he asked to return to his old post.

⁷⁰ The *pradhan* is usually nominated as a person who has the power of *dalaali* (negotiation), through political connection or money power, and is able to arrange resources such as water or electricity connections or mediate with those able to help with accessing state entitlements (Sethi 2006a, 45-46). The post is unofficial and unpaid, so the *pradhan* must make the position earn or at least have some other business that will support him. The *pradhan*'s identity is ambivalent, working for the community as a respected leader and mediator on one hand, recognised as someone who can deliver votes to politicians at election times in return for favours, access and resources, but, sometimes using threats or coercion in order to hold on to power. As informants in Durga Camp pointed out, in a city where slums are under constant threat of demolition and slum dwellers are very aware of their vulnerability a *pradhan* may be able to hold on to power by convincing people that he is the only one who can negotiate the slum's survival. Also see Jha, Rao and Woolcock, (2007)

⁷¹ Election symbols are essential for representing parties to illiterate voters on the ballot paper. The Hand of Congress, the Lotus flower of the BJP, the embellished Hammer and Sickles of the Communist parties and the many other symbols used by state parties are very familiar to people in India, as much from the graffiti that covers walls at election time as from the ballot paper itself.

When he talked about his reasons for giving up the responsibility of being *pradhan* Anand showed a blend of financial and moral pragmatism. He said that from within the *sangathan* he could continue to do some of the work of the *pradhan*, using skills he had learnt with the *sangathan* to help people, and still get paid for it. He realised that he needed the financial support to continue to do social service and avoid the potential moral compromise implicit in being a *pradhan*, as well as being conscious that his wage from the *sangathan* was important to his family's future savings and strategies. As part of this strategy Anand told me that he had bought a small plot of land just over the Delhi Border in Faridabad on which the family could build a house if the slum was ever to be demolished (Field notes, September 10th 2007)

Padma's husband told me that Anand's supporters in Durga Camp had been confused and unhappy when he stood down, and that he had not clearly explained his reasons for doing so (field notes, 25th September, 2007), but perhaps they could not see the balancing act that Anand was trying to manage. Anand finds himself in the odd position of being *bare* (big) in the world of the *chote log* (small people) and *chote* in the world of the *bare log*, but constrained in both. In the slum *basti* he has been elected to an unofficial public role, with concomitant expectations from those close to him, but in the world of middle class 'civil society' this role is framed as potentially compromised by "dirty politics", as illegitimate. His livelihood, and connection to the civil society scene, depends on the patronage of those working at the policy level in the *sangathan* and he is not in strong enough position to strike out on his own or seek his own sources of funding. In the upper middle class Delhi NGO/development world to which the *sangathan* connects him Anand is held back by an inability to speak English fluently, proscribed into the role of the authentic grassroots activist who remains in the slum with his people.

Anand's ability to do his daily work, to function effectively first as an RSS youth activist, then later as a Right to Information activist and *pradhan* of Durga Camp must be viewed in the context of the slum, the slum's relationship to the local state and

political society, the social structure of south Delhi, and his gender. His position as a gatekeeper in a *sangathan* otherwise comprised of women seems to have risen out of the chances that he has been offered as a young man, early opportunities to participate in the public sphere and local political formations, and opportunities to remain in education. These opportunities have enabled him to hold his position and work effectively at the boundary between the social worlds and spaces of those in the slum and those working at the policy level who wish to carry out projects there. Anand's education marks him out and facilitates his ability to mediate between the slum community and state representatives, as well as with the upper middle class people involved with activism and development. Positioned at this boundary Anand's role is open to multiple interpretations and representations: he is the authentic grassroots social worker, a broker and translator for development schemes (Mosse and Lewis 2006, 11-13), a local big man to whom you can take your grievances, or an ordinary, but aspirational and energetic, young man, working hard to make the most of the contingent opportunities that arise. People, including myself, can read meaning into him according to their understanding of how things work, an understanding very much structured by class and the social spaces that they inhabit in the city. Some of these readings help to hold him in position, unable, for example, to move up into the civil society scene that lies open to upper middle class *sangathan* workers such as Anita

Anita

Anita is in her early twenties, a graduate in journalism from one of the elite women's colleges of Delhi University. Her family lives in Defence Colony, a large upper middle class residential area just inside the inner ring road that had been built originally as housing for forces personnel. Defence colony is one of the hubs of the upper middle class south Delhi scene with a busy market of restaurants, clothes shops selling international brands and provisions stores that specialise in imported foreign foods. The colony is also a very popular place to live for Delhi's growing number of expatriate workers and the generous accommodation allowances that companies and international

development agencies pay have provided an opportunity for landlords; ‘Def Col’ has become a notoriously expensive place to live.

Anita describes her family as ‘academicians’, her father teaches in Management, previously at Delhi University and now at a top UK University. Anita was planning to apply to do an MA in the UK at either the London School of Economics or the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) after spending a year working with the *sangathan* to build up some experience, and giving her extra time to apply for scholarships (field notes, July 5th 2007). This was a strategy already followed by Anita’s *sangathan* colleague Tanika.

During Anita’s journalism course Aditi, who was an alumna of the same elite ladies college, had been teaching there. Laughing, Anita told me;

‘Aditi came in to teach us development economics in the first year, but actually she never taught us development economics, she just taught us the RTI’. (Interview, June 27th 2007).

Anita had been interested but had not become involved with the *sangathan* until the third year of her degree when she went along to meet Aditi with a friend. She had begun by volunteering to help with a campaign that the *sangathan* was running with some middle class RWAs about the state of the roads in Delhi, and after graduating had gone on to work full time. The money that she received for working at the *sangathan* came from a fellowship that had previously been paid to Aditi and amounted to around Rs. 7500 per month (field notes July 5th 2007), a thousand rupees more per month than Anand. Over the time that I spent visiting the *sangathan* Anita took on more of a role working with Anand at the grassroots and spending more time in the *sangathan* offices. The impression that I had was that Aditi wanted somebody closer to her to keep an eye on the day to day work of the group. Busy most days Aditi would stay in touch with Anand by phone to get reports on activities at the grassroots, but seemed concerned that some tasks were not progressing as they should. Anand and the community mobilisers were friendly with Anita but, perhaps as a younger woman, did not treat her with the respect that they reserved for Aditi or Simrita.

Until she started work with the *sangathan* Anita had not paid much attention to the slums in Delhi;

‘all the time I’ve been growing up I’ve been so alienated, I don’t think I’ve even thought about whether slums should exist or not. A lot of schools have de-sensitisation programmes⁷² ... but I went to Modern school⁷³ and we never had anything like that, I mean you get into a car, you pass by a slum, you see it everyday... I never had to think about it that much’ (Interview, June 27th 2007)

Coming from the upper middle class and growing up in exclusive and air conditioned spaces it is easy to become disassociated from the heat and the noise of the street in Delhi. On the few occasions that I travelled by car in the city I was always surprised at how disconnected I felt from the street I was used to, sitting in a cool environment with the windows rolled up and watching the world pass. For many upper middle class people in Delhi this is how they engage with the city outside of their own colonies, at least through the hot summer months; moving from air-conditioned house, to air-conditioned car to air-conditioned office, shop or restaurant, although this may be less true for young people, particularly young men with access to a motorbike.

On the day that Anita and I had this conversation we had left the basement office after a Wednesday meeting and taken an auto-rickshaw to Defence Colony market. Walking around the garden in the centre of the market we had discussed where to sit down and chat, and deciding against going into ‘Barrista’, a big chain coffee shop, had settled for ‘Angels’, an independent café and patisserie that serves European food. Both of these are the kind of place that people from Durga Camp would be extremely unlikely to enter unless escorted or invited by someone who fitted in⁷⁴, and could afford the prices, but for Anita and me a place such as this was the obvious choice.

⁷² Anita told me that some schools in Delhi run outreach programmes in which upper middle class school children help children from the slums with studying

⁷³ Modern School is one of Delhi’s oldest and best known elite private schools. See <http://www.modernschool.net/>

⁷⁴ I witnessed an example of this in a different coffee ‘lounge’ in south Delhi. Two thin women in scruffy saris entered, one carrying a baby, and started to walk into the room, towards the counter at the end. A waiter hurried up to them and asked what they wanted in an agitated way. The women had a mischievous look, as if they might have come in to see the sights behind the smoked glass, but

While we drank our coffees Anita told me about her experience of starting to work full time with the *sangathan*

‘I had a mental block against working in the community... I thought it would be like.. you go in and spread information, you know, sort of like the white man’s burden (laughs) you know, you go and you teach them things, but actually it’s the other way around, it’s been a great learning experience because of basic knowledge, like say about the RTI, or about how things work. People like Anand *bhaiya* or Savitri *ji*, they know like way more than somebody like me would ever know because they actually do that every single day.’ (Interview, June 27th 2007)

Anita’s experience of learning ‘how things work’ has been important to her. She has become something of an expert in a part of the *sangathan*’s work and the knowledge that she has gained has made her take a sceptical look at her surroundings and read the city differently. The apparently chaotic development of the cityscape and the condition of much of the infrastructure starts to make more sense when the background processes⁷⁵ are uncovered by an archaeological ‘tool’ such as the Right to Information Act, digging into the municipal work orders and tenders, and sometimes literally into the road, taking samples of the materials used. Although she takes her work seriously, Anita approaches it in a playful manner. She is able to move around the city reasonably freely, often on the back of Anand’s motorbike, visiting slums and low level government offices, entering spaces that would not normally be considered appropriate for a young upper middle class woman. Anita’s work for the *sangathan* literally requires her to “slum it” and the work ‘in the field’ is exciting and interesting for a young person with energy.

then one of them asked for some water for the baby. ‘no no no’ said the waiter ‘now leave, quickly!’ and shooed them back towards the door and out into the hot street.

⁷⁵ Anita’s work for the campaign that the *sangathan* was running on the way that ‘councillor funds’ are spent in Delhi helped to uncover some of these processes. Councillor funds are sums of money given every year to elected municipal representatives to make improvements to their constituencies. The funds have to be spent through local government departments who put the work out to tender. The funds are similar to those given to state and national level representatives under schemes such as MPLADS (see <http://www.mplads.nic.in/>).

When Anita says that Anand and Savitri know ‘way’ more than her she is privileging a certain type of grassroots *jaankaari* over her own literacy in English and computer technology, even though these, which are second nature to her because of her educational background, are the very things that make her most useful to the *sangathan*. Anand and Savitri’s knowledge of the world and ‘how things work’ may not be greater than Anita’s, just rather different, and sometimes, in Anita’s terms, a little alarming.

Anita had been sitting with us one day when Anand was telling me about his past involvement with the RSS. He said that during the recent municipal elections the BJP candidate had contacted him through his RSS contacts and he had gone to meet them. When Anita heard this she exclaimed loudly ‘*Bhaiyaaa?*’ (brother), shocked that Anand would still have anything to do with either the RSS or the BJP (Field notes, July 5th 2007). For Anita the connection does not make any sense, Anand is part of the Right to Information activist world now, a world that draws some of its leading intellectual figures from the non-party left⁷⁶. Anita’s reaction is symbolic of her understanding of the *sangathan*’s ideological affiliations, to the civil society scene as she sees it, while Anand has a more pragmatic approach, recognising that the *sangathan* is ‘non-party’ but not seeing his older personal connection to the BJP/RSS as wrong. Although Anita has gained an understanding of how people in slums such as Durga Camp often have to work through *pradhans*, politicians and other intermediaries to get things done, her worldview casts the personalised nature of the everyday state as a developmental problem that needs to be addressed. The work that she does for the *sangathan* starts from this premise, but then perhaps Anita is not subject to the same conditions as Anand in her daily life and can more easily afford her ideological stance.

Putting Anand and Anita next to each other is revealing of the way that their class backgrounds affect the work that they do for the *sangathan*. Seeing them work together even more so. The functional divide between them is in their use of language and technology. Anand is skilled in reading and writing Hindi but speaks very little English.

⁷⁶ In a number of personal communications I have been told by activist contacts and friends that the leading figures in the scene, particularly those linked to the MKSS, would not consider working with the BJP or other political groups from ‘the right’ under any circumstances.

He is also not very familiar with computers. Anita, as a product of an elite English medium education, essentially speaks Hindi as a second language and is not that comfortable in writing it. A great deal of the work that she does for the *sangathan* involves research and computer work carried out in English. When documents or publicity material for the *sangathan* need to be translated into either language Anand and Anita will work together. In 'the field', the daily work of the *sangathan*, Anand and Anita mediate for each other in accessing different social spaces in the city. Where Anand has the necessary access to a *basti* such as Durga Camp Anita has the necessary writing skills and contacts to get stories into the Anglophone media. Coming from different ends of Delhi's society they meet in the middle, an example of boundaries of class and gender relations being crossed. However the fact of their respective backgrounds means that their shared experiences potentially lead to very different sets of opportunities. There is no need to doubt Anita's hard work, enthusiasm and commitment for the work that she does, but it is a fact that it also provides an excellent addition to her CV in seeking scholarships for postgraduate education abroad or for jobs in the civil society or development sectors, jobs which are not available to Anand.

In Anand and Anita we have seen two people roughly in the middle of the *sangathan* hierarchy, although Anand's is by far the more pivotal role. In the next section I will introduce Padma, one of the community mobilisers for the *sangathan* and then go on to bring in the voices of some of the upper middle class core group, in order to make the distinction between the policy and grassroots levels even clearer.

Padma

Padma is a slight Rajastani woman in her mid forties. She lives in Durga Camp in a two storey house that backs up against the high wall of the 'posh' private English medium 'ABV' school that Durga Camp runs behind. She has worked for the *sangathan* since 2003, starting with the *Mahila Mandal* (women's group) that was set up in the early days of the *sangathan* and then going on to become a community mobiliser. Padma grew up in Chandigarh and was married when she was in 7th class at school, around the

age of twelve or thirteen, and moved to Rajasthan after that. She had been subject to *pardah*⁷⁷ in Rajasthan, but after their first child had been born she and her husband, a stonemason by trade, had moved to Delhi to seek work and she has lived away from the village ever since. She has four children, two boys and two girls, three of whom were born in Delhi.

The move from the village to the city was an important one for Padma. It presented her with an opportunity to live in a place where she would have more personal freedom and to get a better education for her children. In all our conversations Padma would return to the importance of education, the possibilities that the city offers compared to the restrictions of the village and how, through her connection to the *sangathan*, she had managed to get her two sons entry to the upper middle class private school behind her house.

The school system in Delhi is comprised of state and private institutions. The state schools are under-resourced and are not a choice for parents that can afford to send their children to better private schools. The private schools do receive some government funding in the form of land provided at concessionary rates on the understanding that the school would provide 25% of places to children from the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)⁷⁸ on a no fee basis. In 2005 Padma applied to the ABV School under the EWS scheme to see if she could get her sons enrolled. She received no reply, but then, through the *sangathan*, lodged a Right to Information request with the Department of Education asking how many EWS children were enrolled at the school. Within a week she received a letter from the school offering her

⁷⁷ The practice in north India, amongst Hindus and Muslims, of controlling women by physically restricting them to an area such as the family house or compound, and veiling while out in public. For Hindus, particularly of young married women from higher caste families. For example see Wadley (1994, 52-55).

⁷⁸ This figure was reduced to 20% as of May 2004 by a Delhi High Court order. While the schools have been happy to take the land they have been much less happy to pass on the places to the EWS children. A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed in the Supreme Court by the NGO Social Jurist challenged the schools over non compliance and at the same time the campaign was taken up by two sangathans in Delhi to see if school admissions could be obtained for people in the slums the sangathans worked in. See the Social Jurist at <http://www.socialjurist.com/> (accessed 24th October 2010) for more details

sons a place. For Padma this was a remarkable turn of events, from the roof of her house she could see the children playing in the well watered school grounds but had never imagined that she would be able to get her own children educated there. Padma's aspiration for her sons was directly enabled through her use of the Right to Information act as lever in the school admissions process, allowing her to cut across a system in which donations paid to schools to secure places are commonplace (Osella and Osella 2000, 149), donations which she could never afford to pay. From the point of view of the *sangathan* Padma's experience is a success story, real proof that being connected to the *sangathan* and using the Right to Information Act can achieve results. However, working with the *sangathan* also has other effects on her life, requiring her to take social risks that would be unacceptable for some.

Padma's husband had been suspicious about her involvement with the *sangathan*. At the time her sister and brother in law (who is also Padma's husband's brother) were also staying in the house and all of them used to speak out against her going to the *sangathan* meetings. Padma told me the story when we were sitting in the *sangathan* meeting room one day after the weekly meeting had finished.

'initially they used to say that I was wasting time there. I had a small shop inside the house and I used to close my shop when I came here [...] I am a Rajput from Shekhawat and it is a tradition in our caste that women do not go out of their homes. Husbands and other male family members bring water and other things and the girls can't go outside after 12. [...] My brother in law used to tell my husband that I was attending a meeting and he asked me what I did there. I will tell you that I didn't know what happened in a "meeting"⁷⁹ and so I asked Aditi and she told me that it is when two or more people sit at one place and talk over different issues. I told my husband to accompany me to the meeting and not allow himself to be swayed by what others told him but he refused' (Translated from interview recording, March 14th 2007)

⁷⁹ By this Padma means that she did not understand the English word "meeting" when her brother in law used it and had to get Aditi to explain it to her

The opposition from Padma's family to her participation in the *sangathan* grew stronger and her husband sometimes became violent during arguments, but Padma was keen to continue with the connection to the *sangathan*

'I told Anand to talk to my husband. We respect Anand's father very much and my husband calls him brother. We live in the same camp and so Anand used to call me *chachi* (aunty) but I told him that I didn't like that. Now he calls me by name here (at the *sangathan*) but calls me *chachi* at home. My neighbours used to complain to my husband about my children, that they had done something wrong while I was away (at meetings), or to my brother in law, and then the two brothers used to quarrel [...] My sister used to tell her husband that I was not fit to live in society and that no one will sit by me in my community (in Rajasthan). Then Aditi and Anand talked to my husband and took him with us when we went to meet the Food Commissioner⁸⁰. He saw for himself what we did in the *sangathan* and then he realized a bit. Aditi talked to him very nicely and now whenever he has time, he comes and also brings the children. He even brought sweets for me when I spoke in a big meeting.' (Interview, March 14th 2007)

Her husband seems to have accepted the work that Padma is doing to some extent. When I asked him about it he said that the 'NGO', as he calls the *sangathan*, is doing good work, giving the example of his sons getting into the private school, and saying that where he had managed to get work done through the local councillor before, for example arranging the fixing of a water tap near to the house, now the women at the 'NGO' were getting work done faster (field notes September 25th 2007). But Padma told me that despite his appreciation her husband still held some resentment for her partly stepping out of the home. She said that Aditi had advised her to stay calm when he became angry and that that this had worked and he is mostly nice to her now, but then she paused; '*lekin?*' (but?) I asked, '*Han, lekin! Kabhi kabhi...*' (yes, but! Sometimes...) she trailed off, not wanting to speak against him, but raising her eyebrows to suggest that his anger was still a problem (field notes, March 14th 2007).

⁸⁰ In response to an ongoing Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed in 2001 the Supreme Court appointed a number of Food Commissioners to oversee the functioning of the Public Distribution System (PDS). See Jaishankar and Dreze (2005) *Supreme Court Orders on the Right to Food : a Tool for Action* for details of the court orders issued since 2001. Available at www.righttofoodindia.org/data/scordersprimer.doc last accessed August 3rd 2010.

After this when Padma mentioned her husband to me she would call him the ‘*Lekinwalla*’ with the same raised eyebrow.

By attending the *sangathan* meeting Padma is challenging a social order that sets limits on appropriate behaviour for someone of her caste background and gender. She has to do this in order to retain a connection to a group that advocates secular and feminist principles legitimised by a rational-legal social order, the constitution of India and the rights that it guarantees citizens. As MacPhearson notes, research has shown how difficult it can be for women such as Padma to participate in associational life in a city such as Delhi (MacPhearson 2008, 43). But, through the intervention and negotiation of her *sangathan* colleagues, Padma’s involvement with the *sangathan* has been sustained, and has made a significant change to her life and relationships with those around her. She has attended legal awareness training, organised through the *sangathan*, and the *jaankari* (practical knowledge) that she has gained from her work has given her confidence in her own abilities, confirming her feeling that life in the village was too limiting and that she does not particularly want to go back there. Even though she has not tried to get her daughters into the ABV school, preferring that they go to the local government school instead, she fears that a return to the village would mean that they would be married too young or kept out of school altogether. (Interview, March 14th 2007)

Padma is accumulating a form of social and cultural capital, in Bourdieu’s sense of the term (Bourdieu 1986, 243-252), based on class and connection to the civil society scene, rather than caste, although she remains proud of her caste identity. The connections that she has made in the city and the *jaankaari* that has come with them, have enabled her to get her boys into the ABV school and potentially launched them on a different trajectory. They will learn English and perhaps stand a better chance of reaching 12th class and, like Anand, going on to university. She is aware that this new *jaankaari* has taken a great deal of *sangharsh* (struggle) to achieve and that this has partly excluded her from family support and community membership in Rajasthan. Her work in the community is literally shameful to some of her relatives in the village and

has been a source of gossip for her neighbours in Durga Camp. But Padma is not in the village anymore. In the city, in a mixed slum like Durga Camp, she has a little more room for manoeuvre socially, and despite the gossip the benefits to her family are plain to see every morning when her sons attend the ABV school next to the slum.

Padma makes it clear that the *sangharsh* (struggle) she has undergone has been for the good of her family and not for money, highlighting the virtuous nature of the work. Her work for the *sangathan* does bring some money into the household, much needed as there is not always construction work available for her husband, but she seems to see beyond the money that the *sangathan* work offers to longer term goals. When I asked her how much she got per day she said;

‘50-60 rupees⁸¹, but we don’t work for money but for the *jaankari* that we get [...] I came here to educate my child. I couldn’t have even been allowed to enter the gate of the school where my children are now studying. I don’t have to pay their fees and that money is saved. I am able to run my house and I don’t want money, I come here for the *jaankari*. Earlier when I used to go to the offices, the government officers used to tell us to go away and used to rebuke us for belonging to the *jhuggis* (slums). Even when we live in *jhuggis* we are also human beings and pay taxes and so we also want equal treatment. Now, I know my rights and it is all because of the RTI.’ (Interview, March 14th 2007)

Padma, has run a considerable risk in her connection to the *sangathan*, and faced violence, although not, like some transparency activists in Delhi, at the hands of those whose interests the *sangathan*’s anti-corruption work disrupts (Pande, 2008: 53), but from within her own family. Padma’s attitude to the work that the *sangathan* does has a very practical edge and is strongly related to her aspirations. The work offers a new avenue through which to get things done. As with Anand this approach is very much

⁸¹ I never obtained a precise figure for how much the community mobilisers earned for their work. Anand told me that they were paid about Rs.1500 per month and that the *sangathan* received funding in the form of individual fellowships from another NGO to cover this amount, but that the *sangathan* added some more to this from other funds to bring the total to around Rs.2000 per month, including bonus money for attending special events and reimbursement of out of pocket expenses. Padma’s figure of Rs.50/day would roughly confirm what Anand told me. The *sangathan* operates Monday to Saturday, plus extra meetings that are scheduled for off days, and so the community mobilisers would receive around Rs.1500 month as a basic wage. See chapter 8 for further discussion.

conditioned by the social milieu of the slum and the city around it rather than a sense of the wider political agenda of the movement that the *sangathan* is associated with. But her engagement with the *sangathan* is a little different to Anand's. As well as being a *karyakarti* (social worker) for the *sangathan* Padma has also been a client, she is much more like the women that come to the meetings and her success in getting her boys into the ABV School can act as a persuasive example to potential clients. Padma's identity as a poor, but dignified, female *jhuggi* dweller is an important part of the work that she does. Her authenticity confers a type of authority. Like the upper middle class women in the core group she knows what she's talking about because of *who* she is.

The Core Group.

In this section I will focus on excerpts from interviews with 4 members of the core group, Aditi, Simrita, Veena and Yashica. The interviews deal with accounts of the start of the *sangathan* and of their motivations for getting involved. Three of the four interviews were carried out at the private homes of core group members in Delhi and Mumbai. Simrita's interview took place at the *sangathan* meeting room in the quiet time after a Wednesday meeting. It was conducted in the presence of other *sangathan* workers but in English, and so could not be easily understood by most in the room. The threads that connect the core group are their backgrounds working for major international organisations including the World Bank, Amnesty International, UNESCO and the Ethical Trading Initiative⁸², and their experience working in research and developing social policy. The idea for the *sangathan* was developed in response to

⁸² The Ethical Trading Initiative describes itself as 'a ground-breaking alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations. We work in partnership to improve the lives of workers across the globe who make or grow consumer goods - everything from tea to T-shirts, from flowers to footballs.' See <http://www.ethicaltrade.org/about-eti>

a familiar concern about the misappropriation of money intended for development⁸³, in Aditi's words;

I used to work with the poverty reduction and economic management programme of the Bank. And while working there one realised... organisations like the World Bank are giving funds to cause development in certain areas, but, the funds are really a very small fraction of what the govt spends on all these activities, on development activities... the problem really, even more than a lack of funds, is the fact that money doesn't really reach where it's intended, for the purpose that it's intended and that's also true a lot of times of World Bank funds, or donor funds.. so.. there was this conscious sort of decision to try and look at some of the underlying factors which really lead to that misappropriation... (interview, August 7th 2007).

This concern led Aditi to become involved with the Right to Information campaign in Delhi. While volunteering for the campaign Aditi had met Veena. As Veena explains;

'I came back to Delhi after doing my masters at the LSE. I did my dissertation on the RTI implementation. So I went to the LSE and I started reading a lot of things and one of the things that excited me was this whole corruption and the Right to Information and how it could be worked, and I tried to see that as a policy, the dissertation was on the implementation of that policy....

So I was wondering what to do and I decided to do some free lance work, rather than work with an NGO [...] And while I was doing that I started to look at whether I could start to do more in this area as well (with the Right to Information). I didn't know very much about it apart from doing this dissertation and what I learned during that period. I went to *Parivartan* to have a look at what they were doing, and they happened to be involved in this election watch, looking at corruption and this and that.... And then I met Aditi while on this election watch and she said that she wanted to set up this little thing in [south Delhi] and I think what happened was that I was looking to do two things, I was looking to do something in this area, you know, learn more than anything than add some contribution, but the other thing was that I wanted to work back again

⁸³ The idea that money allocated for development does not reach those that it is intended for because of corruption is certainly not new in India. Perhaps the best known, and unsubstantiated, articulation of this is the often repeated assertion by the late Rajiv Gandhi that out of every Rupee intended for poverty alleviation only 15 paise reaches the poor (Dreze 2004, 4; Baviskar 2005, 146), Of the rest 50 percent goes to administration overheads and 50 percent to corruption. For a reiteration of this idea from a leading member of the Right to Information campaign see the chapter by Mander (2003, 149).

with real people you know, I had been a director of this NGO before going to the LSE and sometimes when you run organisations you really... it just takes over everything you know. You tend to forget, no not forget, but to be removed from the people whom [...] everybody else does the work where they are travelling and meeting people and you are managing the organisation which is no fun.' (Interview, September 23rd 2007)

Yashica told me that she became involved because she knew Veena from her course at the LSE;

'I got more and more interested in NGOs and how they run and what drives them and so on and I went off to LSE in 2002 to do this wonderful course with an absolutely marvellous guy, David Lewis, at the Department of Social Policy. I think in a class of 40 people or maybe 30 people we had about 28 countries. So it was huge diversity and that was the best part of it, and that was also what gave one the space and the leisure and the time to examine the kind of theories as well as the various examples of how NGO's run and so on.

Martin: so, was this a one off course? A masters programme?

Yashica: This was a one off course, an MSc. in social policy. I did that after my Phd so that's sort of weird. So having returned from LSE there was this other woman who was with me, Veena, we were both in the same course... Veena had done her thesis on the RTI which had been passed in 2001, the Delhi RTI, there was no national RTI, so Veena and I used to chat and then when we got back Veena got moved to Delhi for a couple of years and then she was consulting with various organisations and she and I would often discuss the desire to go a little more deeply into the whole RTI and the potential and possibilities of RTI for good governance and also as a tool of empowerment. And then Veena met up with Aditi, she had met Aditi when she was researching her thesis, for her masters, and Aditi [...] had already started working in Durga Camp, and a few months later Aditi [...] started [the *sangathan*]. Veena joined her and she asked me to join them and so I did. So I entered this whole thing... I had always found that I was drawn to... naturally the Wednesday meetings and so on were tremendous learning experiences, but I always found myself somehow standing apart from the whole group... mentally. One would be sitting there and I would somehow feel that OK I'm sort of standing away from this and watching it and I'm looking at the macro issues and I always found myself drawn to that aspect. So initially what I did

was I used to write and do press releases and I ended up interfacing with the media a fair amount. And then Simrita came on board...'

Simrita came across the group through a friend and agreed to teach a course on legal awareness to the grassroots workers but ended up more involved than she had planned;

'when the *sangathan* was set up.. I've a friend, Asha who works with me ... Aditi knew her through the Right to Information movement, and said that, you know, "you people are lawyers you come." And she (Asha) said "it is too far for me, I know somebody who is closer," so I came in under the impression that I would just come and teach the women (community mobilisers) once a month. But it wasn't a set up like that, it was very new, it had just started a year ago and people just started coming. They [had] just filed all the applications to get all the records out. Aditi had asked a lawyer to come because [she] realized they needed help. So from there it didn't stick to once a month, it became Tuesday, Wednesday meetings, it became very much more...because all them had babies, one after the other: Aditi, Veena, Yashica, all three of them had babies in the same year, within three months of each other. So I was pretty much handling the show for a year. Not handling the show, but very, very involved. Also what started interesting me is that a lot of the time you told people the general law but then what? What I want to get out of it is that you can get into the specifics, get into... I mean the dry theory, details...how more and more problems are created, for everything. You have a law that sounds very good when it's being implemented, and you try to get it implemented, but what are the problems? so my interest in law [was] this sort of thing, this concept of constitutional law, human rights, constitutional values.'

(Interview, March 28th 2007)

The language that the members of the core group use is telling. Terms such as 'social policy', 'good governance', 'empowerment', 'human rights' and 'constitutional values' start to appear in the discourse of the *sangathan*. Even though some of these concepts may be expressed in the everyday discourse of the grassroots workers, here we encounter terms that are part of development 'project-speak' (Sampson 1996, 123) delivered by people who have acquired the skill to use them through elite and overseas education, and experience in working at the policy and upper managerial levels in development. This is the language needed for funding proposals and legal drafts, the language necessary to represent 'civil society' on government commissions. But at the same time there is also an expression of an urge to do 'hands on' work, to deal with

‘real people’, to connect with the grassroots, the authentic source from which policy must drink in order to validate itself. However, because of the social and spatial divisions present in the city the connection to the grassroots that the upper middle class core group seek is, to a great extent, mediated by the *sangathan* workers who live in Durga Camp.

To sum up: Through these examples I have shown how social class, space and gender affect the way that the work of ‘grassroots’ transparency and accountability activism is carried out, and how even an organisation with a progressive social agenda such as the *sangathan*, being of the city, must work through the social conditions that exist there. We can see how the social position of different individuals enables the *sangathan* to work at the ‘grassroots’ and ‘policy’ levels, both of which are necessary for the group to maintain its identity within the wider transparency and accountability activism scene. We can also see how these factors affect *sangathan* workers’ understanding of the activism scene and their reasons for becoming involved in it, what Corbridge et al might call their ‘sighting’ (2005, 7) of the scene.

Even though I have concentrated on a particular *sangathan* here I would argue that this effect of having to work through class, space and gender in the city applies to other groups doing similar work in Delhi. Membership of a group such as the *sangathan* requires that the individuals that work for it must cross social boundaries and encounter people with whom they might otherwise have little social contact, or where social contact might be structured by other forms of relationship such as employer and domestic labourer. However, it is clear that the crossing of social boundaries and the performance of equality does little to break boundaries down, and that certain individuals, through class, education or gender, retain key roles as gatekeepers to the different social spaces that a group such as the *sangathan* encompasses. While life in the city, and participation in the *sangathan*, might offer opportunities to challenge accepted gender roles and develop new social identities, the way that the group works also helps to reproduce hegemonic ideas of what it is to be a successful citizen of India.

A hegemony based on factors such as social class and education in which the upper middle classes and elites will always do better. For all its positive attributes the *sangathan*, and I would argue the wider activist scene, is a social space in which class inequalities are reproduced even as activists attempt to break them down.

I will return to some of these themes in chapter 7. There we will see how space is made for grassroots workers to perform at an activist conference and how this helps to bind sections of the activist scene together and reaffirm divisions between policy and grassroots action. This will play a part in a wider discussion of the importance of rhetoric, authenticity and a fundamental concern amongst activists about the way that their work is presented in the public sphere.

Chapter 7: From the Performance of Authenticity to the Politics of Transparency

In the last chapter we saw how class, space and gender structure the practice and organisation of a Right to Information *sangathan*. In this chapter I will follow some of these themes further into a central area of everyday activist practice and identity formation, which is the production, reproduction and performance of rhetorical narratives about active citizenship, transparency and accountability. As my starting point I will take the idea that to be an activist is to be *fundamentally* concerned with getting your message out to different publics, including activist, donor and media networks, and also to be concerned with the composition of the message and the way that it frames your activities and aims (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 19; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993, 114; Milgram 2008, 9). As Michael Carrithers notes, an ethnographic approach to the formulation of rhetoric that focuses on the intention of the rhetor, the audience and the situation offers an opportunity to observe the skilled performance of group culture and membership (2005, 582). A study that both examines situated narratives and the process of their creation helps to reveal the interactive nature of persuasive speech, and its use in persuading the self as well as others (2005, 578; Rapport and Overing 2000, 119; Potter and Wetherell 1994, 48). Rhetoric should not be dismissed as mere empty words, but appreciated as a means of contest, or as a creative and repetitive appeal to the ‘common sense’ of a community (Billig 1995, 72-73), or a technique through which groups and wider movements might be bonded together (Fine 1995, 128)⁸⁴. I explore these issues by dividing the chapter into three sections which reveal, in different ways, the importance of rhetoric, and the performance of a politics of transparency and authenticity (Conklin 1997; Lehmann 1998, 611-612; Edelman 1997, 144; Lindholm 2008; Rossinow 1998)⁸⁵ within the transparency and accountability activism scene.

⁸⁴ I am grateful to Hugo Gorringe for introducing me to the chapter on ‘Public Narration and Group Culture’ by Fine (1995) through his paper at the South Asian Anthropology Group (SAAG) 2008 ‘Rhetorics of Change in South Asia’ workshop at Durham University September 8th-9th 2008.

⁸⁵ A reference to the Rossinow’s account of New Left activism in the US and the search for a politics that promotes participatory democracy and is ‘both effective and morally honest’ (1998: 10 -11) is appropriate here. But it is also worth noting an earlier use of the ‘Politics of Authenticity’ by Marshall Berman in his 1971 volume on the development of radical individualism and the emergence of modern society. His explanation of Rousseau’s ‘demand for a synthesis of man and

The first section looks at ‘success stories’, narratives produced by activists to demonstrate successes and struggles and to promote their work to new audiences. Success stories are encountered in a variety of situations and formats: as oral first or second hand accounts by activists in written and pictorial form on websites, blogs, or in newspapers; or as short films, sometimes dramatised, on television or the internet. I introduce examples to show how well practised narratives are deployed in different ways and in a variety of settings and formats to communicate activist messages to the media, amongst whom I include myself, and to potential donors.

I then go on to a piece of ethnography in which narratives about grassroots activism are presented to a sympathetic audience at a conference. Here we will see how the telling of stories and the staging and performance of authenticity is used as a technique with which to cement bonds across class boundaries within the activist scene, and how in that setting, the performance of a ‘grassroots’ authenticity might be offered as a proxy for transparency and accountability.

The last section of the chapter shifts the focus away from rhetoric and the performance of transparency and authenticity as a force for integration and cohesion, and looks at their deployment in a conflict within part of the transparency scene. The ethnography examines a moment in which transparency is performed at a ‘public audit’ of the accounts of an NGO. Here we shall see how groups and individuals are concerned not just with the appearance of transparency, but also with its limits as conflict and gossip plays out in semi-public spaces in real time and on the internet.

The idea that transparency and accountability can be “lived”, embodied as practice in individuals or groups, is an understandably popular one within the transparency activism scene. In the absence of legal or other mechanisms that require individuals or groups to be transparent or accountable concerning their actions or sources of funding

citizen’ brings to mind the promotion of the constitutional rights of individual citizens vis a vis the modern Indian state, and the calls for active citizenship, by anti-corruption and transparency activists.

the performance of transparency and accountability takes on an important role in establishing credibility. Thus some activist groups take the trouble to credit donations and list their sources of income, or individuals might make statements concerning their own willingness to be open, as with one prominent activist whose emails sign off with the brief homily; ‘all my emails are in the public domain, and do share them as you wish’ (email to Hum Janenge message board, 24th July 2006). Statements like these reference a Gandhian discourse that requires activists to set examples as moral agents and ‘seekers of truth’ (Bilgrami 2006, 251), but are also responses to a widespread suspicion that ‘civil society’ initiatives have been coopted by powerful interests or are merely money making schemes (Kamat 2002, 24-25; Rajan and Kak 2006).

Within the transparency and accountability scene it is understood that activists should be beyond reproach and be willing, as one activist put it, to ‘walk the talk’. Linked to this social requirement for the performance of transparency are concerns and accusations from inside and outside the scene that activist groups and individuals are promoting, but not practising, transparency and accountability⁸⁶. This kind of talk is part of the daily buzz of internet message boards associated with the activist scene, but in extreme cases may manifest as direct accusations of corruption, conspiracy or even of ‘anti-nation’ activities (see Rajan and Kak, 2006). Conflicts within the activist scene may be partly played out through accusations such as these precisely because the scene is a social world and some elements of strategy, organisation and funding will always be, intentionally or unintentionally, hidden from view. We will see that the boundaries of transparency and accountability can be contested and flexible, and that claims that particular organisations, processes or people are more or less transparent, like the claims made for the efficacy of transparency mechanisms, are mediated, negotiated and fundamentally rhetorical.

⁸⁶ A Mumbai based initiative called the Credibility Alliance has been set up to address this, by offering, for a fee, accreditation for NGOs and voluntary organisations that they are following ‘norms of transparency, accountability and good governance’. None of the groups that I encountered in Delhi have joined the initiative. See <http://www.credall.org.in/> (accessed 3rd October 2010)

Success Stories and the Work of Representation.

On a Tuesday afternoon in September 2007 Imtiyaz Ali, my research assistant, and I travelled to the *Parivartan* office across the Yamuna in the north east of Delhi. The office is close to a market in a side street that leads into the network of narrow *galis* (lanes) make up the industrial slum area of Sundernagri, *Parivartan*'s home turf. I had arranged with a contact at the *Parivartan* office to carry out a series of interviews with individual activists about their work and motivations for getting involved with the group. But when we arrived we found ourselves in a queue. Already sitting on the woven floor mat in the office space was a journalist from the government TV network *Doordarshan* (DD) who had come to talk about an upcoming episode of *Kiran*, a 5 minute programme on the DD-1 channel featuring information about public services. He was planning a programme on the Right to Information. Over the next hour we sat, journalist and ethnographic researchers, as the *Parivartan* activists told us stories about problems solved using the Right to Information, the success of *Parivartan* in promoting transparency, and some of the struggles and violence that they had faced in the course of their work. At one point the man from *Doordarshan* became a little impatient interrupting the activists' spiel and pointing out that the stories we were being told were quite old and already on the *Parivartan* website. He asked for a 'fresh case' which he could use for the programme. He was quickly provided with a new story of a man struggling to apply for a caste certificate⁸⁷, who had used the Right to Information to hurry the process up. (Field notes, September 11th 2007).

This ability to satisfy the journalist's need for fresh narrative may give the impression that success stories are contrived, pre-prepared for situations such as these. Designed to 'fit into the news plan' as Siddarth Pandey, the corruption beat reporter of NDTV news who has worked with the national Right to Information campaign puts it (interview, 16th April 2007). It is the case that conscious of promoting their work to others many activists adopt 'informant postures' (Cowan 1990, 96) developed through the practice of talking to and organising information for the news media and donor organisations.

⁸⁷ Caste Certificates are documents that confirm a person's caste status and which can be produced as supporting documentation when making applications for positions in employment and education that are reserved by law for members of particular caste communities.

Thus in an interview about his life and motivations for getting involved in activism one of the *Parivartan* workers slips seamlessly from a personal account of how he became involved with the group into a narrative about the group's early successes including a much repeated story about a problem with the power company;

‘A man called Ashok Gupta had applied for new connection 15 years back but was not getting the connection. We advised him to file an RTI application by depositing 50 rupees fee and ask a question from the department as to why his meter was not installed despite the fact that he had applied for new connection 15 years ago. After this a man from the department went to his house and his meter was installed in eight days.’⁸⁸,
(Interview, 19th September 2007)

When I was conducting life history interviews with activists this phenomenon would often occur. Activists would shift back and forth between talking about themselves and talking about the history of the group and its successes, or of the wider movement, moving from the first person to the plural and reproducing stories with which I became very familiar from multiple hearings and in some cases readings. For many activists the events that the stories describe do appear to be significant moments in their lives, moments at which struggle and success made individual membership of the group meaningful and contributed to *esprit de corps*. As well as being useful standbys for interview situations success stories like these are part of the folklore of the group, narratives to which activists can return in order to anchor and frame discussions about their work. This does not mean that activists are unrealistic about the possibilities of what they do or that they attempt to provide entirely positive narratives about their work, but it does mean that there is a basic repertoire of stories on which to build interactions with audiences. Success stories are inextricably bound up with narratives of activists' lives, as we saw in the last chapter with Padma and the story of getting her sons into to a good school, but they also have an instrumental role, ready to be used in activist discourse with outsiders.

⁸⁸ Despite the ubiquity of Ashok Gupta as a name in India a Google search for Ashok Gupta + Right to Information will produce a number of links to versions of this story carried by activist websites.

So let us turn to the anatomy of a Right to Information success story. By playing upon a common imaginary of the relationship between the *aam admi* (common man) and the *babu* (bureaucratic official) RTI success stories resonate with popular discourses about corruption and the state in India (Ruud 2000a; Gupta 1995, Gupta 2005; Parry 2000; Fuller and Benei 2000), but are composed in counterpoint, challenging fatalism and offering the modern promise that government should base itself on participation, consent and public accountability (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967, 4).

In their structure success stories conform to Barthes' formulation for advertisements: the significant elements of the message are formed *a priori* by certain attributes of the intervention that the organisation wishes to promote and are intended to be transmitted as clearly and emphatically as possible (Barthes 1977, 33). To this end they have essential characteristics. They should describe positive change and resolution. They should be based on real cases, offering the promise of verification, and, in order to be persuasive, the story must present a realistic narrative to the audience by dramatising experience (Fine 1995, 141) and encapsulating widely understood 'cultural matter' (Carrithers 2005, 579; Gamson 1995, 86). This is then synthesised with information about the proprietary solution of the RTI. These elements are composed to show the public revelatory proof that the RTI works as an intervention.

Corruption is Everywhere. Secrecy and Mismanagement make it impossible for a Honest Person to survive in this Country.

**Tired of thinking: How long can we carry on like this?
Don't Despair! Now You have the Key to Victory over Corruption!**

SOME WONDERS OF RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Road gets repaired through RTI

Uday is a software engineer who lives in South Delhi and drives to work in Noida. On his way to work one day Uday noticed that the stretch of road from Panchsheel Flyover to Chirag Delhi that had been re-laid in February 2005 began breaking away within 15 days. Technically it is known as 'slip out'. The slip out occurred not at only one point but on the entire stretch 2 meters away from the pavement (approximately the entire bus lane). He filed a right to information application asking to inspect the particular road. After a few days he noticed that the slip out had been repaired by patching up the road at a number of places.

Govt employee gets compensated

Mr. Balwani was working as an Assistant Engineer in Tilak Nagar zone and was transferred within 5 months under pressure from the local MLA. He filed a grievance petition with the Lt. Governor's office and received a reply that he should be compensated with Rs. 10,000 for the hardships caused to him. However, even after these orders from the LG's office, the then DVB Chief and the Chief Ministers Office failed to act on his complaint. He filed a Right to Information application under the Delhi Act on the same issue and received an evasive reply. However, once he filed an appeal with the Public Grievance Commission, he finally received his compensation of Rs. 10,000.

Mayor loses her seat

Using the RTI Act, Maj Gen SCN Jatar (retd.), procured shocking details of logbook entries on innumerable outstation trips made by the Mayor, in their official cars. The total expenditure on cars was a staggering Rs. 5102,235 in just 10 months. According to the entries in log book, the Mayor was present at two places at the same time. On December 18, the Mayor was at Sangamner in one of her official vehicles and at Alibag in another; on May 31 and June 1, she was at Mumbai and Ahmednagar simultaneously; on September 20, she was at Mahabaleshwar and Nashik at the same time and on December 9, she was in Mumbai and also in Ahmednagar. The Public Information Officer confirmed no audit has ever been carried out on the use of official vehicles. The Mayor lost her seat in the next election.

Right to Food realized through RTI

Kaniram is an 80 year old man who lives with his wife Gulfo in Othon ki Pahari in Beawar District of Rajasthan. They have no children and own only a barren piece of land and a small jhuggi. Under the Public Distribution System's Annapurna Yojana initiated by GOI, Kaniram and his wife were given a ration card and were to receive 10 kg of food grains free of cost. However, for almost a year they were not provided even a single grain of rice or wheat. On October 13, the Right to Information Act 2005 came into force. In an application under the RTI, Kaniram asked the government to explain why he had not received his ration. Within two days the ration shop owner came to his door and delivered 100 kg of ration.

Inspect on-going Public Works around You. You have nothing to lose, and everything to gain!
The Right to Information Act 2005 is effective in yet another way: through Citizen Inspections. According to the law, you have the right to inspect public documents, as well as public works! What if every time there was construction or any other public work taking place nearby, you demanded to inspect the work in progress, and even take sample of materials used? Knowing the work would be inspected, it would be carried out honestly and done right -- For the First Time! We've seen it happen, and it can work for you!

**You have a Right to Know!
Use the Right to Information to
Make a Difference.**

(A success stories flyer produced by a Delhi based NGO on behalf of the National Right to Information Campaign. Collected in the field in 2007)

The flyer shown above offers a number of success stories with a mix of protagonists, a software engineer, a retired major general, a government official affected by an arbitrary transfer and a poor man from Rajasthan seeking to gain access to government food rations. As a citizen of India each has the 'key to victory over corruption' through

using the Right to Information. Although it is not obvious to the casual reader, the stories belong to different sections, and groups, within the national Right to Information campaign. Uday the software engineer's story comes through *Parivartan* and has been much used in public presentations on the Right to Information by Arvind Kejriwal, the figurehead of the group (Kejriwal 2006). The Major General is a leading member of the *Nagrik Chetna Manch*, a middle class activist group based in Pune, Maharashtra and the story has featured in news articles promoting the work of the group (Indian Express - Pune edition – October 13th 2004). The Kaniram story comes through the MKSS in Rajasthan and is used in their own paper and video promotional material (Roy 2010, 6). The story of the Government employee getting his compensation comes through the Delhi Right to Information campaign (see <http://right2information.wordpress.com/page/89/?archives-list=1> accessed June 17th 2010) and shows that activists recognise that government servants are also citizens who may suffer from the abuse of public office.

If these stories have been chosen for reproduction across different media by activists, and in some cases are still being reproduced, particularly across the internet, then what are the main features of their construction? Let us take two archetypal, and much reproduced, success stories, the first concerns a man from Delhi called Nannu. It has proved to be such a good example that it has been reproduced across multi-media: spoken; printed; via internet; and even on national television. To illustrate how the story works I will present three versions of it: a plain text rendering; then a cartoon and text version that was part of a 2007 calendar produced by an international NGO; and finally a description of a TV advertisement. First the plain text:

'Nannu is a daily wage earner. He lives in Welcome Mazdoor Colony, a slum habitation in East Delhi. He lost his ration card and applied for a duplicate one in January 2004. He made several rounds of the local Food & Civil Supplies office for the next three months. But the clerks and officials would not even look at him, leave alone do his job or bother to tell him the status of his application. Ultimately, he filed an application under the Right to Information Act asking for the daily progress made on his application, names of the officials who were supposed to act on his application and what action would be taken against these officials. Within a week of filing application

under the Right to Information Act, he was visited by an inspector from the Food Department, who informed him that the card had been made and he could collect it from the office. When Nannu went to collect his card next day, he was given very warm treatment by the Food & Supply Officer (FSO). The FSO offered him tea and requested him to withdraw his application under Right to Information, since his work had already been done.' (Quoted from the website of *Parivartan*, undated).

The story introduces a cast of modern Indian characters set in a familiar narrative of struggling to get bureaucratic work done: Nannu as the daily wage earner and slum dweller, the powerless subaltern who requires a ration card to access the food welfare schemes provided by the government; the uncaring officials in the food supply department safe in their jobs and unwilling to work without inducement; the big officer, unreachable for someone like Nannu in normal circumstances. But, after Nannu uses the RTI act, the power relationship is inverted; the message is that if he can achieve this result as a relatively powerless individual then anybody can.

The version from the NGO calendar shown below encapsulates this message but adds emphasis to the inversion of the power relationship between the government officials and Nannu. He is shown in a scruffy vest and *dhoti* delightedly sitting on a throne as the officials fete him. The situation is extraordinary, and it is clear that it is the almost supernatural intervention of the Right to Information, represented by a protective halo over Nannu's head that has enabled it.



Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

RTI applications must be accompanied with an application fee. Citizens must also pay additional fees that include photocopy charges, inspection fees, as well as cost of CDs, floppies and samples. Information must be provided within 30 days from the date of application. Fees will not be charged from persons below the povertyline.



Nannu is a daily wage earner who lives in Welcome Mazdoor Colony, a slum habitation in east Delhi. He lost his ration card and applied for a duplicate one from the Food and Civil Supplies Office in January 2004, but for months nothing happened. Ultimately, he filed an application under the RTI Act asking for the daily progress made on his application and the names of officials responsible. Within a week, an inspector from the department visited Nannu and informed him that his ration card was ready for collection.

August						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Picture from the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) Right to Information Calendar 2007, August. The calendar introduced a different Right to Information success story for each month.

The third example is from the NDTV '24x7' rolling news channel. It is an advertisement for the Drive Against Bribes campaign in 2006 (see chapter 5). The channel was showing short segments every 30 – 45 minutes in which success story material would be presented in a fast-cut style. In one 30 second example, background images of people walking in the streets and speeded up footage of a crowded station

overlaid with moving fragments of text was mixed with stirring synthesizer music and drumming and the words ‘Every country gets a time when a law, changes its direction’ spoken in Hindi and in Hindi and English script. As the music swelled and grew more urgent this was followed by Nannu, shown as a talking head, describing his experience, this time in short sound bites;

‘I was running around for months. Ration officers were not listening to me. But I didn’t pay a bribe. I had RTI. They were made accountable when I asked questions. I immediately received my ration card.’ (From NDTV footage, broadcast 15th July 2006⁸⁹)

Each short sentence was spoken in Hindi by Nannu and spelled out in Hindi and English script accompanied by background visuals to one side of Nannu’s head: of Nannu holding a red ration card⁹⁰, Nannu crouching to pick up grain with cupped hands from a pile on the ground; a pen moving across a printed RTI application and signing a name; a flame moving against a dark background, and then, as the music suddenly dropped to a single poignant piano melody, the phrase ‘if Nannu can do this then why can’t we?’ in Hindi and English script appeared (from NDTV footage broadcast July 15th 2006).

Nannu’s story translates well into a multi-layered TV presentation. The advertisement is skilfully designed to communicate on different levels so as to be understood in the many spaces in which televisions are watched, in the home and in noisy public spaces where the sound cannot easily be heard such as barber shops, paan kiosks or shopping malls. The symbols in the piece are easily read: grain to signify common basic needs and daily bread; the red ration card to show Nannu’s state assessed urgent need and the role/responsibility of the developmental state in providing for its citizens; the signing of the RTI application as rational procedure, simplified process and active citizenship, in contrast to the potential exclusion brought by failure to interact successfully with the

⁸⁹ This segment can also be viewed in videos uploaded to YouTube by activist groups in India and the US. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zB1juNsBxQ> for example (accessed 26th November 2009).

⁹⁰ Red for *Antodyaya* (poorest of the poor) consumers (see the visit to the Food Supply Office in chapter 5 for more details of the public distribution system).

local state; and RTI as a light, illuminating and revealing in an otherwise uncertain darkness.

I now turn to a second story which comes from the Rajasthan based activist group, the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS). The events described actually took place in 2000 (Roy and Dey 2001a), but the version I am presenting has been updated to be used as part of the publicity for a the Drive Against Bribes Campaign in 2006. The story was picked up from the MKSS by NDTV, the national television channel that acted as the main media partner for the campaign, and broadcast on July 15th 2006 as part of a rolling news report. The text here is taken from a transcript of the report posted on a website providing news and resources to those interested in the Right to Information, providing further evidence of the way that success stories can travel through different media;

‘RTI has once again helped come to the rescue of people in nailing those responsible for the “mother of all Rural Development scams” in Rajasthan [...] The scam was not exposed with the help of any sting operation or hidden cameras but by villagers who used their Right to Information to nab the culprits. Using their Information rights over 70 villagers collectively demanded the records of their Panchayat and the frauds this revealed is truly staggering. Forty-nine out of the 146 works undertaken simply did not exist. The list includes five wells, seven roads and six primary schools, which existed only in government records but were never built on the ground “[...] government officials colluded from top to bottom for their corrupt deals. Similarly, we need to constantly monitor their work and fight collectively if we want to curb corruption,” said Shanker Singh, Coordinator, MKSS’ (Mahan 2006).

As with Nannu’s story a relatively powerless group, this time of ‘villagers’, with little idea of the money that is being administered on their behalf by the local state apparatus, overturns the status quo. Development and basic rights have been denied through corruption and lack of good governance but this has not been revealed by the type of sophisticated clandestine operation popular with the Indian news media (Mazzarella 2006), but rather by ordinary people using a simple legal mechanism.

So what can we conclude from the way in which these stories are presented? Let me draw out some points. Some groups within the Right to Information scene have strong connections with the media and have developed resources and initiatives around managing these relationships. The success stories from *Parivartan* and the MKSS have gone through a process of translation and composition, in this case into English, making them easily reproducible particularly through computer based text media. They are recomposed as frames through which people might think about accountability, power and active citizenship.

In the stories we can see groups highlighting different practices concerning the use of the Right to Information that have developed as the movement has grown. The case from rural Rajasthan is from 2000, a relatively early point during which the MKSS, with its focus on collective action, was developing strategies that would be taken up by later groups such as *Parivartan* (Jenkins and Goetz 1999; Jenkins 2007; Baviskar 2010). It is the collective use of the right to information by a community that is being highlighted here. The release of public information about development works allows collective analysis and comparison to what exists on the ground to provide evidence of corrupt practice (Jenkins and Goetz 1999, 605, Jenkins and Goetz 2003, 127).

Nannu's story, from 2004, is an example of the Right to Information being used by an individual for 'grievance redressal'. The 'RTI' is presented as a probe to stir bureaucratic inertia. The officials provide the ration card in the hope that he will not pursue the Right to Information request any further and expose their lack of professionalism. Nannu gets his work done, but there is no further mention of the information that he requested. As we saw in chapter 5 with the strategy used in the Drive Against Bribe campaign, this is an innovation in the use of the Right to Information taken forward by *Parivartan* and other groups that has proved popular with the media, but has drawn criticism from some in the movement who see it as a departure from the earlier aim of promoting collective action and the rigorous analysis of information.

The stories downplay potential difficulties in using the Right to Information. Any suggestion that gaining access to information might be just as complicated as any other bureaucratic process, particularly for those with little status or education, is elided in favour of a message that places empowerment and simplicity in the foreground. This reflects the preoccupation amongst activists (highlighted in chapter 5) that, as far as possible, they should not be playing the ambivalent role of a *dalaal* (middleman/broker) (Baviskar 2010, 138) between those wanting to use the Right to Information and the government, and that the Right to Information application process should be seen to offer a do-it-yourself method for people to engage with the state.

Finally, the stories depoliticise their subjects showing them as making formal claims through the law as equal citizens of the secular Indian republic, rather than informally through mediated claims to communal rights based on caste, class or political affiliation (Chatterjee 2001, 177; Corbridge et al. 2005, 4; Das 1995, 85-90). In doing so activists are simultaneously referencing an idea of India as a modern nation united under its constitution that objectively plans for the welfare of its citizens (Veron et al. 2003, 4), and virtuous development discourses about empowerment and participation (Cornwall 2007, 472) that invite uncritical acceptance of the narratives.

I have chosen these particular stories from many other possibilities as they have been so widely reproduced. They have transcended their existence as descriptions of events that occurred to particular people at particular points in time and have taken on new significance as knowledge resources for public speaking, training, policy documentation and web based activism. Magnified through reproduction on the internet they have become artefacts, tools for and symbols of the movement. Their appearances act like footprints by which the movement's support networks and alliances might begin to be traced. Reproduced in an international NGO policy review (Paul 2006, 3), or in a filmed presentation to a US based development NGO and donor (ASHA University of Florida 2007). Found in UNDP documents on the Right to Information in India (Mishra 2003, 36) and in hundreds of other web pages belonging to movement supporters (for example see <http://kohlgill.wikispaces.com/SuccessStories> last accessed

21st October 2010), allied groups, bloggers and the news media⁹¹. The content and structure of success stories, the ordinary nature of their subjects and in some cases their provenance, encourages reproduction and imitation by those sympathetic to the movement. Some stories are understood to be the work of well known groups such as *Parivartan* and the MKSS by those that reproduce them, even though reproductions may not reference the group directly. Reproduction of a particular story, the insertion of the 'ideoscape' (Appadurai 1996, 36) of the movement into the 'mediascape' (1996, 35-36), by those that have access to the technological and social interfaces necessary, gives a chance to become part of the rhetorical work of activism, a vicarious connection to authentic grassroots action and the wider movement.

For an example of how this vicarious connection might work I will now turn to material that shows how success stories are used to promote the Right to Information to members of Non-Resident Indian (NRI) networks in the US that provide support to activist groups working in India. I will source material for this section from two films of presentations given by Arvind Kejriwal the figurehead of *Parivartan*. The first film is of a talk to the Bay Area (San Francisco) chapter of the Association for India's Development (AID) dated October 21st 2006 (Association for India's Development (AID) 2006), and the second to the University of Florida chapter of the student development network 'ASHA' on June 1st 2007⁹².

The two films are amateur videos uploaded to the internet by American activists very distant from the grassroots actions taking place in India. They show Arvind speaking to small audiences in the type of bland modern room designed for meetings or seminars. This is very similar to the spaces in which, during my fieldwork in Delhi, I heard him speak on many occasions. In both films Arvind gives a well practised presentation in which the narrative and timing are so similar that I will describe the films together.

⁹¹ I am wary of the ephemeral nature of web resources but considering the way in which RTI success stories are reproduced through the internet it seems appropriate to note that web searches using the terms nannu + RTI and Janawad + RTI will lead to hundreds of web pages that refer to those stories. A search for RTI + Success Stories will lead to many other examples.

⁹² See (Association for India's Development (AID) 2006; ASHA University of Florida 2007)

He begins by explaining the philosophy behind the RTI act using familiar activist tropes: that every person, ‘even a beggar’, pays taxes and has a right to know how government money is being spent; that the ‘people are the master and the government is the servant’; that the Right to Information is enshrined in the Constitution by Supreme Court rulings; and that the RTI act simply provides a mechanism through which to enact that Constitutional right. He goes on to tell a version of how the RTI act came about, tracing it back to 1990 and the ‘movement’ to obtain information about government welfare and work schemes started by ‘some of the poorest people in the country’ (AID 2006, ASHA 2007) under the leadership of Aruna Roy and the MKSS in Rajasthan. By employing the founding narrative of the Right to Information movement, Arvind locates the movement’s origins in collective action and uses it to explain some of the technicalities of the Right to Information Act, the scope, fees, appeals process and penalties for officers that do not respond to Right to Information applications.

At this point in both films, having established the idea of a cohesive Right to Information scene, Arvind turns to the work of *Parivartan* in particular saying that he would like to share some experiences from their work in Delhi. First he introduces a version of Nannu’s story then brings in other examples involving more middle class protagonists, including the story of Ashok Gupta and the electricity connection told to me in the *Parivartan* office in September 2007. Arvind finishes;

I have personally benefited by using the right to information in several ways. In fact in my house now if anything goes wrong and there is a government agency involved then my mother starts saying ‘lets use right to information’ (big laugh from the audience)’ (Association for India’s Development (AID) 2006)

During the film of the talk at the University of Florida in 2007 Arvind gives an almost verbatim version of the Nannu story. Arvind’s speech is so well practised that he can deliver it almost word for word at meetings months and even years apart⁹³. In fact

⁹³ Yet another version of the Nannu story, this time from a 2008 presentation by Arvind at the Google office in Hyderabad can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQbigp_SHeE (accessed November 27th 2009) and another text version from a lecture by Arvind to the Indian Institute of Technology (Kanpur) Alumnus Association in 2006 which is very similar to the two filmed versions cited above (Kejriwal 2006).

during my fieldwork I saw him make almost identical presentations to audiences of upper middle class and elite residents welfare associations in Delhi, although in this context examples in which the city's slum dwellers gained their rights from the state as citizens were not quite so well received (fieldnotes: June 2006).

In the US, in his role as an ambassador for the Right to Information 'movement' in India, Arvind's presentation, validated by the success stories it contains, is directly intended to persuade existing members of NRI groups that the work they support is having an effect, particularly at the grassroots, and thus to continue to supply the funding that helps to sustain groups like *Parivartan*. As Arvind notes in a message to AID chapters that he had not been able to visit during his 2006 tour;

'Many people across the country are giving up their mainstream careers and doing RTI work full-time [...] these people need to be supported. It was requested to groups and NGOs to institute as many fellowships⁹⁴ as possible to provide basic sustenance to such people. IFA (India Friends Association) has immediately agreed to initiate 5 fellowships. AID (Association for India's Development) has instituted an anti-corruption fund of \$50,000 to use for RTI and NREGA⁹⁵ related work. Asha Bay Area expressed a desire to support a few people working on RTI in education. Many chapters of AID and Asha expressed a desire to provide fellowships whenever required.' (Association for India's Development (AID) Tempe chapter 2006)

As an alumnus of the elite Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) at Kharagpur who renounced his successful career in the Indian Revenue Service to become a full time activist, Arvind embodies a particular type of success that makes him the ideal person to present to the NRI audience, and to particular types of upper middle class audience in India. He has succeeded once in the conventional world and then again in the unconventional world of social activism winning international recognition for his work. The success stories that Arvind presents in his lectures, the MKSS parable of collective

⁹⁴ Fellowships are funds provided to individual activists to support them in the course of their work. I will introduce this system in more detail in chapter 8.

⁹⁵ NREGA - National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

action and *Parivartan*'s tales of individual action, provide the necessary descriptions of the problems facing people in India and offer the possibility for listeners to be agents of change and rationality in an imagined future India by becoming part of, or simply supporting, the Right to Information campaign. Indeed Arvind specifically requests that his listeners;

‘please take this one message away from this hall when you go home, then send out messages to all your friends and relatives back home in India that: now you don’t need to pay bribes, if they have any problems they should use right to information’

(Association for India’s Development (AID) 2006)

There are many other facets to the way in which funding streams to the RTI movement are organised, particularly connections built over time and based on friendship, recommendation and trust (see chapter 8), but success stories make a significant contribution to organising the support of the NRI groups. They are the concrete examples, delivered by an authentic activist, required to validate the flow of funds essential to groups within the RTI network in India. Filming these presentations, and uploading them to the internet, provides opportunities for US based activists to link themselves to particular ‘movement’ narratives within India and play a part in the work of transparency and accountability activism that goes beyond offering financial support.

So to sum up, in this section we have seen how success stories are constructed to project an image of activist work, and help to provide those who wish to be connected to it a ready source of narrative and a means of referencing the work of authentic grassroots groups. We have seen how the presentation of success stories by particular individuals might help to draw in support from abroad for activists working in India, and how the personality and status of the activist telling the story is important to this process. In the next section I will introduce ethnography that will show how narrative and the performance of authenticity are structured into an activist conference in India. Here I will focus on a presentation by Savitri, the grassroots *karyakarti* (social worker) from the south Delhi *sangathan* (who we met in chapter 5) and argue that making space for narratives from the grassroots helps to bond the transparency and accountability

activism scene together by reaffirming to participants from different social backgrounds that it is a broad based social movement and capable of acting as a cohesive force.

Transparency by Proxy: Authentic Voices at the South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR) Meeting.

In mid June 2007, 'South Asians for Human Rights' (SAHR) held a two day meeting titled 'National Consultation on the Right to Transparent Governance' at the India International Centre (IIC) in Delhi. All of the groups that I had been spending time with in Delhi were going, as well as many from outside the city, and it was an excellent opportunity to spend two days escaping from the June heat in the attractive and air conditioned environs of the IIC. Many leading figures from the national RTI movement were participating along with well known names from Indian 'civil society', campaigning journalists and human rights lawyers. From within government the Minister for Public Grievances and the Chief Information Commissioner attended and the meeting was presided over by the chair of SAHR I.K. Gujral, the former Prime Minister of India. I am focusing on this meeting because in this case I was able to trace a speaker through the preparation process and up onto the conference stage. However the phenomenon I will describe was a central feature of many of the activist meetings and conferences I attended during the course of my fieldwork.

The meeting was held in a large auditorium and divided into consecutive panel discussions on different topics. It soon became clear that the Right to Information would dominate proceedings as a key component in campaigns that various groups were running on issues such as political funding and election reform, the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and the implementation of central and state government policies relating to employment and welfare. Concern about liberalisation and corporatisation ran alongside concern about corruption, with public accountability as an overarching theme.

Despite one activist dismissing SAHR to me as a 'who's who of people that do nothing' (field notes, June 17th 2007) the meeting had brought together a wide cross-section of

people from the transparency and accountability scene, offering a space in which the links and alliances between grassroots action and the elite levels of politics, the civil service, academia and the media could be observed. The blurred social distinction, and concomitant glass ceiling, that has developed between those who work at the Anglophone ‘policy’ level (Elite educated upper middle class), and those that work at the Hindi speaking grassroots (Hindi medium educated lower middle and working class) was also on view. The SAHR meeting provided both high ranking outsiders and what Fine calls ‘movement entrepreneurs’ (1995, 133), those from the policy level of the scene working on developing legislation and involved in influential networks, with an opportunity to hear success stories from grassroots activists from around the country. Panel discussions between senior activists, lawyers, journalists and invited bureaucrats were often accompanied by presentations from grassroots workers, authentic voices from the field better able to describe the ‘ground realities’ of daily interaction with the state or of the uses of the Right to Information by local groups. In the conference programme these presentations were labelled ‘peoples voices’.

The difference in dress and demeanour between the workers from ‘the field’ and the urbane Anglophone professionals was striking. The field workers could often be identified either as coming from *gaon* (village) or *jhuggi* (slum) and were speaking Hindi free of the liberal smattering of English used by the middle and upper class speakers. The narratives that the field workers provided were listened to uninterrupted, as complete pieces, not as parts of the panel discussion. The stories were often humorous, describing confrontations with local bureaucrats or village Panchayat representatives in which the power of the official was overturned by activists using the Right to information to make them accountable. As the stories were told the audience reacted with raised eyebrows or amused shakes of the head at the antics of the bureaucrats, and laughter at the inevitable punch line where an officer would be revealed as foolish or make pointless attempts to cover the tracks revealed by the Right to Information. Some of the stories were more serious, detailing violence against activists in the course of their work. In almost every case the narrative was of the venal,

lazy or overweening official or local politician brought down by a group's rigorous analysis of information gained through the Right to Information Act.

The narratives at the SAHR conference highlighted the work of activist groups and improvements to local systems of governance in the groups' area of operation rather than individual grievance redressal; the focus was on collectivity and on the direction of 'the movement' as a whole. In this forum grassroots groups were keen to show how the work that they were doing in their local areas was making a difference, and their stories and reports about the progress of public audits or campaigns allowed groups to demarcate areas of operation, interest and types of practice.

On the second day of the SAHR meeting I had travelled to the IIC with Savitri and Simrita of the south Delhi *sangathan*. At the group's weekly meeting four days earlier Anand had told Savitri that she would have to speak at a meeting of '*bade log*' (big people) at the weekend and that she should talk about the ways that the area has benefited from the group using the RTI Act. Savitri looked a little nervous and Anand went to reassure her. He asked her to tell him what *fayada* (benefit) had been gained from using RTI. Savitri slowly gave a list; the ration distribution system had been improved; the drain running through the slum had been cleaned; children from the slum had gained admission to the best local schools; and people had gained *soochna* (information) and *Jaankari* (practical knowledge). Anand intervened and suggested some phrases to strengthen the message a little; '*soochna na ho to kuch nahin kar sakte*' (if we don't have information then we can do nothing) and '*soochna se phir shiksha par aur tab dusri cheezen*' ([we] gained education through information and then other things [followed]). One of the other women present suggested that Anand dictate Savitri's presentation to her, but Anand refused. Savitri was annoyed at the suggestion and, regaining her usual forthright manner, said that she would speak in the way that she is accustomed and added dramatically that she would not worry as, '*hal*

main Kali Maa mere upar aa gain theen’ (lately Mother Kali⁹⁶ has come over me)
(field notes, June 13th 2007)

Savitri was speaking last on her panel and she seemed to be becoming nervous as a very popular woman from another Delhi RTI group spoke immediately before her, but finally her turn came. She started hesitantly, but as she went along talking about the group and the successes that they had had her voice strengthened and a more familiar Savitri emerged. Her speech had been typical of many that I had seen given by grassroots workers at this conference, and in similar spaces: in the local language or regional accent, usually only a few minutes long, fast paced and building up in pitch and rhetorical intensity to peak at the end. In contrast to conference discussions of activists from the educated social elite this style can appear over simple and sometimes inarticulate. Any group present at the SAHR conference could have chosen an articulate multi-lingual graduate from an elite university from amongst its members to explain its work, and for certain presentations this was the case, but it was clearly important that some success stories were told by activists unmistakably from the grassroots, which presents us with a question; what is the intention and effect of this type of presentation when it plays to an informed audience at an event such as the SAHR conference?

As to the intention an answer might be found in a special issue on the Right to Information of the Indian journal ‘Seminar’ from July 2005. The issue was titled ‘The Problem in Speaking Truth to Power’, and featured articles authored by some of those organising the 2007 SAHR conference. The introduction quoted the South African Communist Party leader Jeremy Cronin; ‘We have to learn to speak truth to power. We have to make truth powerful. And we have to make the powerful truthful.’ (MKSS Collective 2005). By collecting together an audience of activists and policy makers from inside and outside the transparency and accountability scene the SAHR

⁹⁶ Kali; ‘perhaps the most dramatic form of the single goddess is the ferocious Kali, who reveals her supremacy over the gods when she is iconographically portrayed as trampling on the corpse of Shiva’ (Fuller 1992, 41). By referring to Kali, Savitri is not just asserting that she has *shakti* (power) but also that she is *khatarnaak* (dangerous). In other conversations Savitri had told how the local policemen and officers at the Food Supply Office (FSO) were afraid of her and the *jaankaari* (practical knowledge) that she had gained from using the Right to Information, and that nowadays they treated her with respect.

conference provides a stage-managed opportunity to speak truth to power. Narratives told by working class grassroots activists overtly communicate the efficacy of the work that groups do to those attending from the government, media and development organisations. The message is projected *outwards* and designed to demonstrate that the movement has social breadth, and that the law can be understood and used by ordinary people. The ‘truth’ is made more rhetorically powerful by being spoken by an authentic *jhuggi*-dweller or villager.

As Beth Conklin notes in her work on the relationships between Amazonian Indians and environmental organisations, donors and policy makers are ideologically oriented to support grassroots groups directly so that funds are not lost to bureaucratic intermediaries (1997, 722); which is also the case in India (Kamat 2002, 17; Omvedt 1993, 191). This concern about transparency and legitimacy leads to a focus on the authenticity of grassroots representatives, an authenticity which must be performed, and to some extent ‘staged’ (Conklin 1997, 725)⁹⁷. Just as Win notes in the African Feminist activism scene (2007, 82), in a conference situation physical evidence of a group’s connection to the grassroots must be produced and we can see this intention being formulated when Anand coaches Savitri for her presentation to the conference, and in the inclusion of space for the presentations in the conference programme.

The presentation also has as an internal effect to the activist scene. Providing space for the authentic grassroots worker from “the field” to tell a success story plays a part in the maintenance of the scene’s self image and sense of self worth. It shows to middle class and elite insiders, aware that their social position distances them from the grassroots, that the work can be understood and carried out by the *aam janata* (common people/general public), the majority of the population. The authentic first person voice of the *jhuggi* dweller or *gaonwallah* (villager) is evidence not just of success but of participation, essential for groups that self identify as ‘peoples’ movements’. At the same time the audience reaction shows to grassroots workers that their work, the day to day struggle of promoting legal mechanisms such as the Right to

⁹⁷ Here Conklin draws on the work of Dean MacCannell, see (MacCannell 2001, 98)

Information, with its associated social and physical risks, is valued along with the better rewarded ‘policy’ work. The applause that they receive is in part for who they are as much as what they do.

In this and the previous section I have looked at rhetoric and performance of authenticity as a means of drawing in support and contributing to integration within the transparency scene. Where Arvind Kejriwal’s presentations speak across international distances and to a particular, international, class of Indian people, Savitri’s presentation speaks across social distance within the transparency scene in India. In both cases the person delivering the presentation and the style in which it is done are crucial. There is no doubt, activist modesty notwithstanding, that Arvind is *khas* (special/distinct) because of his personal success, the awards that he has received, and his position as an articulate figurehead for the Right to Information scene; Savitri on the other hand, in the context of the SAHR conference, is *aam* (common/ordinary). She is speaking from a particular, and for many, an unvisited, space in the city, a voice reporting across a social boundary. For Arvind and Savitri’s audiences it is their respective social positions and authenticity as grassroots activists that are important; their words carry authority because of who they are, the performance of grassroots identity is offered to persuade the audience that the work is being done. The performance of authenticity is offered up as a proxy for transparency.

In the next section we will encounter the performance of transparency and authenticity again, but this time in the context of conflict within the movement. We will see a situation in which the performance of transparency carries a potential risk. This takes us to the heart of transparency and accountability activists’ concern with representation and the limits of transparency as we see how activists negotiate a boundary between what is made public and what remains private.

A Transparency Tamaasha

(*Tamaasha* – a show or spectacle)

As I set out in the introduction to this chapter it is important for groups involved in the work of promoting transparency to show that they ‘walk the talk’, and this is particularly true when it comes to the issue of funding. Groups and individuals within the scene have faced direct attacks in print from those suspicious of their political motivations and funding connections and there is a general sensitivity about sources of financial assistance. For organisations showing some details of income and expenditure in the form of an annual report accessible through a website is quite common, as are statements about the sources and the nature of their funding, although these are not always kept up to date. At some public meetings that I attended, particularly those organised with the close involvement of the MKSS, accounts relating to the organisation of the meeting itself would be read out (field notes, September 16th 2007). But such performances do little to defuse the issue. There remains a constant murmur about the necessity of transparency and the possibility of conspiracy, particularly on the internet message boards frequented by transparency and anti-corruption activists.

To illustrate this I will now move to an example in which *Soochna Khabar* (Information News) an NGO involved in promoting the Right to Information held a public audit of its accounts. Outwardly this event appeared as a fairly straightforward attempt by a group of transparency activists to “walk the talk” and was received as such by many; however, it was also read by activists closely involved in the social life of the scene as being very much related to personal and political struggles within the Right to Information scene, and as part of a hidden agenda.

Soochna Khabar had been set up with funds from a major foreign donor by Delhi based activists and journalists who had gained experience working with the Delhi Right to Information act and wanted to push the Right to Information, and its success stories, up the news agenda. It was intended to be part of a process of scaling up the work of promoting the Right to Information, moving into an area of work that the grassroots *sangathan* which *Soochna Khabar* sprang from did not have the capacity to organise.

As the director of the NGO, a former journalist put it

‘we were in touch with a lot of people who wanted to fund us, to fund our activities, and when the national act was coming it was felt that there should be someone who should take the success stories of [the Right to Information movement] to the masses. How to do it? Media is again the need. So we wanted to create this parallel media house... and we established *Soochna Khabar* to document the stories. You can say that we started picking up raw stories from the field and baked them, cooked them up and served to the media houses. Because you know when I was working with the media houses I was always eager to do these kinds of stories and everyone was (would say) “oh this is a very good story, this is a headline, this could become the third headline of the day, But! You know that today Advani⁹⁸ is doing this thing so it’s better that you report there... so tomorrow we will do this story” and tomorrow never comes’ (interview 13th March 2007)

Soochna Khabar had been quite successful in using media contacts to push the issue of transparency into the news agenda. It had played a significant role in media campaigns related to the Right to Information and made useful contacts within the development world becoming involved in the UK Government: Department for International Development (DFID) supported Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) Programme⁹⁹. However, the scaling up process had proved divisive. The NGO’s foreign sources of funding, association with donors such as DFID, and payment of higher wages and benefits to reflect its more professional status had led to grumbling from the grassroots, a familiar problem as Rob Jenkins points out;

‘Within India’s activist community, civic groups that are not “people’s movements” are regarded as NGOs, a kind of lesser species of nonpolitical or even depoliticized social action. This perspective is best described as movement populism—an ideological orientation stemming from a belief that the more formal organizational forms embodied by NGOs fail to prioritize poor people’s

⁹⁸ The director is referring to L.K. Advani the leading Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) politician as an example of a personality who might knock a more interesting story off the top of the news

⁹⁹ See <http://www.pacsindia.org/> and <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Working-with-DFID/Funding-Schemes/Funding-for-specific-countries-or-regions/IPACSP/> (both links accessed 24th October 2010)

concerns and thus merely perpetuate elite biases. The origins of movement populism lie in the widespread discrediting of NGOs that took place in the early 1980s, when sections of the Indian left began to attack foreign-funded NGOs (and Indians who worked for or with them) as “agents of imperialism,” and activist groups began avoiding the NGO label.’ (2007: 64)

Rumours had begun to circulate within a section of the Delhi RTI scene that individuals associated with *Soochna Khabar* had gained personally by undertaking consultancy work. There was also a feeling that those working for the NGO were benefiting from high wages and perks while the real work of committed grassroots activism on which the NGO ultimately depended was being done by lowly paid grassroots workers. As we saw in chapter 5 when Anand spoke about the ‘policy’ level depending on low paid work at the grassroots to produce case studies, this is a relatively common grumble within the activist scene. However, a leading member of the scene closely involved in setting up *Soochna Khabar* defended the scaling up process;

‘every funding has it’s own place, when you are in struggle based mode, then you can’t take funds, I mean for instance India’s independence could not have been done by taking funds from [foreign donors]... India’s independence had to be fought by the people of this country, Right to Information is precisely about fighting for your independence, it’s a struggle with the authorities and people have to participate, it cannot work in an NGO mode and therefore (grassroots activism) exists in a particular mode. *Soochna Khabar* is not a struggle based organisation, when you want to spread this on a large scale you are not struggling everyday, you just need to make films and pamphlets, for that you need to have money... it’s basically task based division of labour’ (Interview, August 2007)

But the rumours continued to develop and when the public audit of *Soochna Khabar*’s accounts was announced many scene insiders aware of the gossip took it to be a calculated attempt by the NGO leadership and those allied to them to finally settle the matter.

The *Soochna Khabar* office is upstairs in a non-descript building developed for small businesses in a lower middle class area of concrete 4 storey houses, motor repair shops and builders merchants. It takes up two rooms behind a first floor veranda. One room is large and used for meetings with a table, chairs and TV/video set, and the other room slightly smaller containing desks with computers. On the day of the audit the large meeting room had been cleared to leave a space with chairs around three sides and three tables lined up against the remaining wall. Each table had a label at the front showing a year '2005, 2006, 2007' to which the box files and folders lying on top related, these were the accounts for the audit. All the staff of the NGO were in the room, sitting on the chairs around the walls. The director was seated at the end of the line of tables. Standing in front of the tables and examining the files was the only person in the room that I didn't recognise, a woman of about 30, and she was not happy.

The woman introduced herself as Rita. I realised that she was one of the people that had replied on the internet message board to the announcement of the audit. There had been three replies, two of them brief and congratulatory, but Rita's message was more pointed and, to those that knew the gossip, heavy with irony. In the email she commended the announcement of the audit, adding that it was long overdue that a group in the transparency scene should take the lead in applying the 'right to know' to themselves as well as others. She also named particular individuals, those involved in a recent split from an activist group close to the NGO, and noted that it would be appropriate to acknowledge their role in persuading *Soochna Khabar* to provide such an excellent example of transparency and accountability (Summary of a message posted on a transparency activism related internet message board, August 2007).

Rita had worked in the Right to Information scene around the time that the Act was passed in 2005 and knew many people in the scene very well. But since then she had moved on to follow her interest in labour activism in the new Special Economic Zones being developed close to Delhi. Although she was concerned about the reputation of some activist groups in the scene, Rita was not depending on any of the groups, or the

patronage of leading figures, for her livelihood and so had room to manoeuvre, and to criticise.

I was very relieved to see someone else at the audit. I was in a similar position to Rita in that I was a partial insider with no allegiance to any patron in the RTI movement. In fact I was welcomed by the *Soochna Khabar* staff as someone impartial, almost as an international observer to their display of openness. But unlike Rita I also felt extremely socially constrained and not particularly able to ask difficult questions about the accounts that I would see. I had no interest in attempting to hold the NGO or its staff to some arbitrary standard of transparency and was keen to avoid questions that might show that I was aware of the gossip behind the scenes and possibly mark me as allied with a faction. Luckily Rita's energetic and somewhat confrontational mood allowed me to remain in the background a little, although she would occasionally try to draw me out, 'Martin! You're not asking enough questions' she said at one point, 'I think you're asking enough for both of us' I replied, returning quickly to looking at the papers laid out on the tables (from field notes, August, 2007).

It was telling that Rita and I were the only people attending other than the NGO staff. The audit had created a charged social space in which it would be difficult for those socially involved in the scene to be present without being seen to be taking sides in the gossip. It seemed that for the majority of people that had been informed about the audit it was either sufficient that it was being held, or too socially awkward to attend. Rita later told me that she had come to represent some of those in the second category (field notes, August 30th 2007).

The accounts were presented in a very raw form. Boxes of receipts relating to different account headings, 'travel' or 'campaigns', lay on the table with little further explanation about what they referred to. Expenditure on 'campaigns' might be given for a year, but not broken down into easily understandable components, a heading might list a large sum spent on petrol over a certain period, but not show any details of vehicles, journeys or mileage, the sheets that listed the wages bill for the NGO showed

fluctuations in amounts with no accompanying explanations. The amount of data was overwhelming and the effect created was one of opacity rather than transparency; little could be gained from examining the data in the relatively short time available.

Rita became increasingly irritated by the presentation, forcefully telling the director that this was not good enough and that no NGO that she had ever worked for had kept their accounts in this way; ‘if you are a lead organisation in RTI then you should be *most* transparent’ she said. The director defended himself, saying that the accounts had been signed off by the accountant, and he joked that anyway a group such as the NGO does not come under the Right to Information act. Rita responded that the lead organisations in the ‘RTI movement’ should devise understandable ways of showing their accounts whether they came under the Right to Information act or not and added that it would be very dangerous if people with ill will for the movement came to the audit and saw this.

She asked for a number of documents to be provided to her, in particular a ‘monthly activities list’ and a ‘monthly breakdown of accounts’ so that she could track travel expenses and expenditures or income from the sale of books/CDs or other promotional material. Rita also made a number of suggestions about how the accounts could be presented and organised, and these were noted down. I also asked for any documents that were available in ‘soft copy’ in order to make it as easy as possible for the NGO staff to send them to me. The director wrote our requests down and promised to send the documents within a week.

The argument between Rita and the director continued for a few minutes with no sign of resolution, until, in quick succession two prominent members of the Delhi Right to Information scene arrived, let us call them the VIPs. Their presence had the immediate effect of diverting and slightly diminishing Rita’s telling off of the director. Although they both spent some time saying hello to people before finally sitting down near to the director their arrival effectively broke the flow of Rita’s argument and so she went over to them and reiterated her complaints and worries about ‘the family’ of Delhi Right to

Information groups. She spoke for a few minutes more then after turning around to say goodbye to me, she left.

As soon as Rita had left the audit seemed to be over and a meeting was called. There was some talk about general business but the discussion soon moved on to the situation that everyone had been gossiping about. Some of the *Soochna Khabar* staff spoke, reporting recent events as they saw them and concluding that most of the gossip was coming from one source, a person who was a close informant of mine. Finally a decision was made. One of the VIPs said gently that my informant is a nice guy, but that all this personal gossip about *Soochna Khabar* is damaging, so perhaps it would be best if the staff did not have anything more to do with him. I could not help seeing this cathartic moment, in which the decision is finally made to exclude a person from a particular part of a network, as having great significance, but perhaps that would be to read too much into it. My informant had actually been trying to break away from this particular corner of the scene's social networks but had not been very successful. I had spent a lot of time listening to his plans for the future and attempts to carve out a space for himself in the wider scene, now it seemed that he was to be ejected from this part of it anyway.

After the meeting the day's business was finished. The group split up with some returning to the smaller office. I went to say goodbye to one of the young men that I knew at the NGO. He asked me what I thought of the audit and I told him that it was difficult to work anything out from the way that the accounts were presented, 'it's like a *tamaasha*, a transparency *tamaasha*' I said, and he laughed and agreed with me (fieldnotes, August 2007).

Almost a month after the audit Rita was sent part of what she had requested, but was unhappy at what she had been given. She wrote a very long and angry email to the director of *Soochna Khabar*, carbon copied to leading personalities and groups in the Right to Information scene. She details her version of the audit day, and then launches into a long complaint that she had still not received the information that she had

requested¹⁰⁰. Often making points in bold type and referring to ‘the movement’ throughout Rita outlines her concerns that the audit had been a public relations exercise, which, were she not close to the movement, would have led her to the conclusion that the NGO and perhaps even the whole movement were hypocritical. She goes on to ask ‘publicly’ but within ‘a small circle of friends’ that the NGO should adhere to the same high standards, or even higher, that the movement expects of the government. She also protests that she has no interest in attacking *Soochna Khabar* or individuals associated with it, that her request for information from the NGO does not imply that she suspects fraud, and that she hopes that suggestions that she is acting as an ‘agent’ for anybody were made as a joke. She goes on to say that she is very aware of the potential for damage to the reputation of the movement were she to send this mail to an open internet list-serve where ‘troublemakers’ might use the information to attempt to discredit the movement.

I too did not receive any of the information that I requested from the NGO, even though once or twice when I met people from the office I asked them about it and after apologizing they said that they would send it as soon as possible. In the end I did receive the information that had been sent to Rita, but only as it was forwarded to me by email by another activist. In truth, while I was interested in having the information, I was much more interested in whether I would actually get it in the first place, this question was answered satisfactorily.

So what of the public audit? A public event that in the end remained a private affair, kept within a small circle of people. The information that Rita sought either not given or not as detailed as she wanted, and her perception that she should protect the greater good of ‘the movement’ overriding her need to expose what she felt was bad practice at the NGO. But then there is no evidence at all of any wrongdoing at *Soochna Khabar*, there is only gossip, and the public audit did appear to be a genuine attempt at transparency by a group of people perhaps more focused on the day to day excitement of activist work than dry month to month accounting systems. The rumour put about

¹⁰⁰ I have the original text of the email but have summarised it here in the interests of anonymity.

within parts of the Delhi Right to Information scene that the audit was cynically announced in the knowledge that no-one associated with the scene would risk attending is easily countered by pointing out that it was announced publicly on an internet forum populated by some of the activist scene's most strident critics. There are some extremely vocal and iconoclastic members of the internet forums who mistrust the motives of "*jholawalla*"¹⁰¹ 'movement' activists and their leaders. Those people, the same that Rita was keeping her findings from, had exactly the same opportunity as Rita and me to attend the audit.

A later conversation with Rita about the day of the audit revealed more about her position on the gossip that had prompted it. She talked nostalgically about the way that the Right to Information 'movement' had been two years before when she had been more involved in it. She said that in those days people had struggled more equally and there had been a functioning system of egalitarian decision making, but she felt that this had been broken down by the consolidation of power and money around key individuals as the scene had matured. She added that some of the elite leaders in the Right to Information movement had managed to transcend class differences, but that others did not appear to have tried and had made their upper class or elite position a successful selling point. Rita's self professed Marxist perspective may have much to do with her analysis of the situation; others equally close to the activist scene who heard of the gossip dismissed it as simply an inevitable feature when groups scale up and go through a process of 'institutionalisation' (Field notes, September 12th 2007). In the end the argument between Rita, those that she is representing, and those involved with *Soochna Khabar* is about transparency and authenticity, about whether activists believe that the NGO is doing the 'true' work of grassroots activism or whether, as Rita feared, RTI activism had become 'a business' (field notes August 30th 2007).

To sum up, the transparency *tamaasha* at the *Soochna Khabar* office has given us an insight not just into the performance of transparency but also into the practical view of

¹⁰¹ *Jholawalla* literally means "bag-fellow" but is a derogatory term used to refer to a stereotypical middle class left wing social activist who dresses in kadhi and carries a cloth bag, a *jhola*, to denote simplicity and solidarity with the poor.

transparency taken by those associated with the activist scene. People within the scene are aware that transparency has limits, the same boundaries that exist between the public and private in everyday life regulate what may or may not be made public in the practice of transparency activists. As Aruna Roy one of the national leaders of the Right to Information movement asserted to me in conversation; ‘transparency does not mean a lack of privacy, it’s not “yellow journalism”¹⁰², it’s not about exposure, it is where collective responsibilities are discharged with collective accountability’ (conversation September 16th, 2007). Part of the practice of being a ‘movement’ insider is to be aware that one is part of a political movement with a particular agenda, and that there are people who would seek to damage the movement. This means that although a transparency activist may be committed to the cause of promoting transparency they remain, as Rita does, careful to regulate the flow of information into the public domain. In part it is this work of rhetoric and representation, or the willingness to do this work, which identifies activists as members of particular groups within the wider transparency and accountability scene.

To conclude: In this chapter we have seen how activists employ rhetoric and performance in different formats and settings, and with different intents. By looking at success stories we can see how groups advertise themselves, and how the presentation of narratives helps to bond individuals to groups, and provide differently positioned actors with opportunities to see the activist scene as a whole. The use of narrative also plays a crucial part in helping to organise the funding necessary for the work of activist groups to continue, and we can see how important the person and social position of the rhetor is in delivering these narratives. Depending on the context the most suitably authentic speaker is chosen to deliver the presentation. In these situations the performance of authenticity helps to validate the content of the presentation, acting as a proxy for transparency and accountability.

¹⁰² Yellow journalism is a term for the type of expose led reporting carried out by tabloid newspapers, the “Red Tops” in the UK for example.

In the public audit of *Soochna Khabar* we approach the practice of transparency and authenticity from a different direction. The audit is an example of a performance of transparency that is criticised for its lack of authenticity. For Rita the audit is not the real thing, but her concern about the greater good of the movement overcomes her urge to be public about her misgivings. Her argument that the audit is being done merely for show has to remain hidden, something that causes her distress and disillusionment but confirms her allegiance to the political project of particular groups within the transparency and accountability scene.

Thus ethnographic analysis of narratives of transparency and authenticity, and rhetorical performances, allows us to see how important the management of public representation is to the work and identities of activists. There also appears to be a paradox inherent in transparency and accountability activist's concerns over the representation of their work, and how they negotiate the boundary between transparency and opacity within their own practice. Surely they should be 'most transparent' as Rita puts it, but if they are not it should not come as a surprise. The transparency and accountability activism scene is a complicated social world. Its connections and hierarchies are not easily read through the types of transparency and accountability mechanism that activists would apply to the state. It is not organised along formal, rational lines, an observation which leads me to the subject of my next chapter.

Chapter 8: Informality, Commitment and How to Survive as a Full Time Activist

‘Activists – “People who care enough about some issue that they are prepared to incur significant costs and act to achieve their goals”’ (Keck and Sikkink, 1998:14)

In looking at the world of transparency activism in Delhi there is one broad question that I have not addressed directly. That is: how do organisations and individuals within the activism scene sustain themselves, and thus ensure that their work continues? We have already encountered some examples through the discussion of class in chapter 6, and through the sensitivity over funding and accounting that prompted the public audit at the NGO in chapter 7. However, there is a great deal more to be said about the ways that funding and resources flow within the scene and the principles around which they are organised.

In recent decades as national and international donors have been keen to build up alternatives to state led development (Sheth and Sethi 1991, 61-62; Chandoke 2003, 241-242) ‘grassroots’ organisations focused on empowerment have found themselves well positioned to take advantage of ‘reformist trends in the world of funding agencies’ (Omvedt 1993, 191; Calman 1992, 16). Groups in India taking up more recent ‘buzzword’ issues such as transparency and accountability (Fox 2007) have been the amongst the beneficiaries of these funding agendas¹⁰³, and have developed new connections to international funding networks focused on supporting social entrepreneurship (Fowler 2000; Ziegler 2009; Leadbeater 1997).

Groups within the transparency and accountability scene do not always access funds from donors directly. At the everyday level, echoing what Keck and Sikkink observe in transnational human rights activist networks (1998, 9), and grassroots rhetoric

¹⁰³ See the UK Government’s Department for International Development (DFID) Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) project at <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/working-with-dfid/funding-opportunities/countries-and-regions/ipacsp/> or the Ford Foundation’s efforts to fund initiatives ‘promoting transparent, effective and accountable government’ at <http://www.fordfoundation.org/regions/india-nepal-sri-lanka/for-grant-seekers> (both accessed 8th July 2010)

notwithstanding (Sheth 2004, 45), relations between grassroots groups and professional NGOs within the transparency activism scene are close. Informal alliances and mutual aid between groups play an essential role in the organisation of campaigns. Some grassroots groups maintain intimate connections with established and well funded NGOs who are able to provide personnel, resources and access to equipment without providing any direct financial support. Informal arrangements like these can be found in the links between the MKSS and the Social Work Resource Centre (SWRC) at Tilonia in Rajasthan (see Jenkins, 2004: 226-227), and were very much present in activist networks that I observed in Delhi (field notes, December 5th 2006; April 12th 2007).

For people carrying on the daily work of transparency and accountability activism, those dealing with what activists call the ‘ground realities’, the ground reality of activist work itself involves engagement with a variety of formal and informal organisations. Working in and between grassroots groups, registered trusts, NGOs and internet based networks and forums; and across roles and identities as members of ‘peoples’ movements, patrons, active citizens, community mobilisers, clients, professional NGO workers or social science researchers. Some activists are more dependent on the scene for their income than others. For community mobilisers or grassroots workers, such as those at the *sangathan* introduced in chapter 6, money earned through work for the group may make a significant contribution to household income. For young educated middle class activists involvement with the scene might help support an independent life in the city living away from their families. The scene offers opportunities for activists to build careers which can see them pass through a number of different groups. They might volunteer with a grassroots group and then move on into professional NGO employment or research work, or if they already work in the NGO sector they might volunteer in their spare time. But, as we saw in chapter 6 these opportunities can be limited by social position and educational qualifications, and the need to access funding, or a basic livelihood, can tie activists to particular groups and to the goodwill and agendas of particular patrons.

There is also a great deal of voluntary participation within the scene. At the edges of the local grassroots group/NGO networks there are many independent activists who contribute a great deal to the wider movement for transparency and accountability but may or may not be affiliated with any group in particular. Amongst these we might find the stalwarts of middle class ‘civil society’, journalists, academics, lawyers and business people, as well as those we might call “grey activists”, retired senior military personnel and senior civil servants, working and retired journalists, or well established upper middle class business people. For the most part these people are financially secure and do not need to seek external funding for their projects, but they may also supplement their incomes by consultancy work associated with the scene, and attempt to organise funds for groups that they are associated with.

To begin to make sense of this complicated field of interconnected individuals and organisations I will start by focusing on an overarching theme which structures relationships and flows of resources within the activist scene. This is the discursive construction of the scene as an informal sphere in which individual commitment is seen to be more important than economic rewards; a commitment that suggests moral integrity. By the term informal I mean the antithesis of the formality suggested by a bureaucratic organisation with its official roles, responsibilities and hierarchical chains of command. This construction of moral integrity flows from culturally embedded ideas about voluntarism and professionalism, of personal sacrifice, selfless service and voluntary participation, about the value of commitment compared to the ‘business’ of professional NGO work.

This is significant because, as we have seen in previous chapters, transparency and accountability activism is directed towards guaranteeing rights and delineating appropriate boundaries for Indian citizens between the public and the private spheres, between formal and informal roles in state bureaucracies. At the same time, as we saw in the *Soochna Khabar* audit in chapter 7, transparency and accountability within the activist scene is a concern around which activist practices, and criticisms of those practices, condense. Yet, at the grassroots *sangathan* level, groups within the

transparency and accountability activism scene are uncomfortable about producing the formal bureaucratic structures that might make them appear accountable because it suggests that participation in the work of the group is not voluntary and that members of the group are not equal. Meanwhile in registered NGOs attached to the scene that are organised along more bureaucratic lines the informal commitment and integrity implied in being associated with activism remains a powerful idea.

Noting the effect that these ideas have had on the way that funding is structured in the activism scene, in this chapter I develop a picture of what it means to try to sustain a living as an activist. I highlight the paradox that, while people within the transparency and accountability activism scene seek to promote rationality, accountability and formal guarantees for citizens' rights, it is informality and the negotiation of patron-client relationships which remains at the heart of the scene's own organisation. In this mode of organisation the charismatic authority and reputation of leaders (Weber 1947, 358) and their ability to recommend others for funding becomes important. Social and cultural capital, and the ability to make alliances, emerge as significant factors in individual's trajectories within the scene. I am not suggesting that there is *hera-pheri* (dodgy dealings) or corruption in the organisation of the transparency and accountability activism scene. What I am arguing is that the personal and informal nature of the activist scene, like the everyday state and society that it seeks to discipline, itself resists a disciplining gaze. Despite the rhetoric and performance of transparency and accountability in the activist scene much naturally remains hidden in the messy interplay of social relations.

The Role of Informality, Commitment and Credibility.

A discourse of informal commitment runs through the everyday talk of volunteers and full time workers for transparency and accountability. It is a necessary part of the job of convincing others that active citizenship is worthwhile. Activism should not be treated as employment but rather as a calling, something that individuals are compelled to do. We can see it in action at the *sangathan* in chapter 6 when Aditi talks about the importance of Anand being 'passionate' about the work that the group does (Interview

August 7th 2007), and Anand's own assertion that the 'personality development' that the group offers him is more important than the Rs.6500 that he earns from his *sangathan* work each month (interview July 5th 2007). We can see it when Anand's colleague Anita tells me that the *sangathan* does have difficulty retaining young upper middle class volunteers, but the fact that the *sangathan* does not pay them helps to screen out those who are not committed enough. It is expressed by Rajshekhar, a worker in another Delhi grassroots *sangathan*, when he says;

'As far as (our *sangathan*) is concerned, we are not a registered organization. Ours is a movement (*movement hai, registered body hai nahi*). We tell people to come to us and if their problem is solved they will trust us. We invite people to verify our accounts anytime. We have nothing to hide. In my opinion trust can only be built by working.' (Interview, September 19th 2007)

It is expressed in Padma of the south Delhi *sangathan*'s dramatic assertion that; '*Is kaam ke liye, maine pati ke alawa sab chhod diya*' (For this work, I left everything except my husband) (Interview, March 14th 2007) when she talks about how as a Rajasthani Rajput she has faced violent opposition from her extended family for being involved with public life through the *sangathan*, but has carried on because it means so much to her. The discourse is also employed by workers in professional NGOs that take part in the scene. Nandini, an expatriate NGO worker of Indian descent involved in the Right to Information scene at the policy level was very sensitive about criticisms she and her co-workers had received from some activists who saw her organisation as too removed from the 'ground realities'. She was at pains to state her grassroots credentials and commitment to me:

'So I am an expat working at a non grassroots place, it didn't have a lot of cred. Luckily I should say in my own defence, the first thing I ever did in India was like 4 years before when I did a year volunteering in Chennai where I was teaching kids in a school for poor kids and helping out a couple of small health clinics, so I actually worked in India like way at the grassroots. I was earning no money and catching the bus to work and that kind of stuff, so I at least did have some sense of it. It (the Right to Information work) wasn't the first thing that I had done, but they wouldn't have known that and I really get why they would see us as a bit more elite because we did sit in

Delhi in our at least semi air conditioned offices, I wouldn't say it was cool but there were air conditioners around.' (Interview, July 28th 2008¹⁰⁴)

Jagdish, an Indian colleague of Nandini, was equally sensitive about the question of commitment. He told me that as an unmarried man he did not have many needs and that he had previously given up a year's salary at the NGO to show his commitment to the work that the NGO does (field notes: 16th July 2007).

For an authoritative voice on this issue we might turn to Shekhar Singh a well known and senior figure in the environmental and Right to Information activist scenes. During an interview with Singh at which Sahila, a young worker in the Right to Information scene, was also present, he argued against professionalisation and for voluntarism in the transparency scene while setting out the issue of funding movement activism in practical and political terms. Speaking hypothetically he said:

'listen I'll tell you what the problem is... in a country like India how you get your money and how you raise your money becomes a very important issue ok? Now suppose I was to work full time say in an RTI movement and get paid for it, well given my requirements etc. etc. I'd probably need 50 or 60 thousand rupees a month as a minimum, which is not a very high salary these days, I mean people get lakhs of rupees, you know I have a family and so and so. In order to be able to support me then [the movement] would have to raise money from sources from which it doesn't want to raise money from ok? And therefore you'd start compromising, because if you start getting foreign funds then you become an easy target of the government which says that there are a lot of foreign governments which are trying to undermine the development of the country. You know this has been an old thing and they are trying to tighten up the FCRA¹⁰⁵ rules now etc. for that reason, and you know the xenophobia that exists in India, you've been subjected to it so you know, we don't like our former rulers¹⁰⁶... (laughing)... So you see that there are certain internal contradictions, that's one part of the problem ok? Now it's alright for somebody at Sahila's level because she

¹⁰⁴ Nandini had played a very important role in the lead up to the passing of the Right to Information Act but had left India for a job with the UN before I began my field work in 2006. The interview was carried out in 2008 using a 'Skype' connection.

¹⁰⁵ Foreign Contributions Regulation Act, of which more below

¹⁰⁶ He is referring to a story I had told about having faced hostility as a foreign researcher.

doesn't require that much money so one can support her without having those sorts of problems, but take Daljit (referring to a lawyer associated with the activist scene) for example, you can't possibly support him in the lifestyle that he lives or I in the lifestyle I live through an organisation which doesn't take anything but donations, so that's one part of the problem. The second part of the problem is (that) the question of your own personal credibility is very important in India. Now what has happened... these are cultural things.. if you are living in a society where everybody is being paid to do these things then there is no question about credibility, ok? [...] See culturally in India what happens is if I am drawing a fat salary from [an organisation] then your own credibility becomes in question, and civil servants think 'aha, he's milking this particular cow, he milked the environment cow earlier, he'll milk some other cow tomorrow', you know that sort of thing, so it's a cultural thing, ok?' (interview December 12th 2006)

Singh's assertion that a grassroots 'movement' group could not afford to keep somebody like him is provided partly as encouragement to his young colleague to follow a career that allows a reasonable standard of living, but which also allows time to do activist work informally, or to seek other sources of funding such as fellowships, scholarships or development research grants that allow activists to do work that involves their own groups or localities. He is making the point that although an individual activist might earn a living through formal contracts with outside employers or donors their involvement with the group should remain informal and based on personal commitment. In support of this Singh has also acted as patron to younger activists, helping to arrange funding for promising young people so that they might be able to sustain their engagement with the activist scene (data from an interview with an activist carried out in August 2007).

Singh's comments about culture, credibility and sacrifice are also particularly relevant here. As we saw in chapter 7, public presentations, in India and abroad, by authentic grassroots workers may be offered as a proxy for transparency, as evidence that the organisation the worker represents is actually working at the grassroots. In the performance of transparency the body and voice of an authentic grassroots worker can act almost as a receipt for donors, potential critics, or those that require some sort of

validation or credibility (see Conklin, 1997: 722). For upper middle class or elite activists credibility, and moral authority, can be earned through showing commitment and most importantly through demonstrating sacrifice. The materialistic trappings and aspirations of middle class life might be renounced, or perhaps more often denounced, in a way that owes much to the Hindu ideal of ‘desireless action’, of offering *seva* (service) without requiring recompense, and seeking spiritual liberation by engaging in practical social action (Bornstein 2006, 173; Watt 2005, 3).

This traditional idiom of ‘saintly politics’ (Morris-Jones 1963, 140-141) has been a central part of political action in India since before independence. It has been idealised through iconic figures in the nationalist movement: Gopal Krishna Gokhale the founder of the Servants of India Society¹⁰⁷ (Wolpert 1961; Watt 2005); later, and most influentially, Mohandas K. Gandhi; on through Gandhi’s political children and members of the *Sarvodaya* (progress for all) Movement Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan¹⁰⁸ (Sheth and Sethi 1991, 61); and later still through contemporary figures such as Anna Hazare in Maharashtra (Jenkins 2004). Just as Henkel and Stirrat note that in the west the practice of the modern secular development worker owes much to the philosophy of non-conformist Christianity (2001, 174), so these activist renouncers reference a political tradition based in indigenous practices of otherworldly asceticism. This is a modern tradition of selfless service that relates active citizenship directly to nation building (Watt 2005, 171).

In contemporary Delhi this discourse of sacrifice and selfless service may take different forms, may be relatively limited, and among the activists that I encountered is inflected through social class and status. Take the case of middle class grey activism linked to the transparency and accountability scene.

¹⁰⁷ Watt notes that although the Servants of India Society was based on secular principles it was seen by many as a Hindu organisation and as a result Muslim membership was comparatively low (Watt, 2005: 184)

¹⁰⁸ Incidentally both Bhave (1958, Community Leadership) and Narayan (1965, Public Service) were Ramon Magsaysay awardees with Bhave being the first awardee for Community leadership. See <http://www.rmaf.org.ph/?id=3&page=byName#B>

System Rationalists and Satyagrahis.

On a mild day at the beginning of October 2007 I pedalled the few minutes from my colony to Green Park, a sprawling upper middle class colony in central south Delhi. I had got to know its leafy streets quite well from meeting informants in the busy central market with its sweet shops and cafes, and visiting NGO and foundation offices based there. Today I was going to meet Deepesh, a retired senior civil servant. Deepesh is an active and independent campaigner on transparency and accountability issues and I had come across his regular postings on the nationwide internet list-serves concerned with the Right to Information and good governance.

He and his wife live in a flat on the second floor of a recently built block. Deepesh answered the bell and came to the steel security gate at the entrance to the flat to let me in, locking it again behind me. The flat was a typical neat middle class space with a formal living room, but rather than sitting there Deepesh took me through to his workspace in the bedroom, a small writing desk with a computer monitor and keyboard balanced on top. As we began talking about his work one of the first questions that he asked me was whether I had Googled him or had done 'net research' on his work. Deepesh told me he spent eight to ten hours a day on the internet in this cramped corner moderating his own message boards and monitoring others. He listed the 20 or so internet groups that he is active within, ranging from those specifically focused on anti-corruption, e-governance and Right to Information issues to those of more general interest such as 'Dil Se Desi' (Deepesh translated this as 'in your heart you are Indian'). Some groups were international in scope moderated from the US by NRIs. Deepesh made it clear what his internet activity meant to him.

'I think when you talk about struggle for transparency and public accountability, one has to mobilise as many people as possible. Now that kind of a thing happens only when you are able to reach out. Internet enables me. Sitting in my chair in my own bedroom I can reach out to about 130,000 people. So I believe at the age of 67, being a retired person, this is the kind of social service I can do.' (Interview, October 1st 2007)

Deepesh had been involved with accountability processes throughout his working life. He had spent twenty years in the Indian Audit and Accounts Service (IAAS) the government body that deals with public accounts and reports to parliament and state legislatures and then had spent more than a decade at a major 'PSU' (Public Sector Undertaking)¹⁰⁹. After retirement at 60 he had become involved, freelance, in organising training programmes for industry in contract management, corporate governance and internal audits. As he had become more interested in the Right to Information he had made that the centre of his focus running workshops for management associations in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. He had also become part of an expert consultancy group on the Right to Information set up by a private academy. For a yearly subscription government departments and PSUs can contact the consultancy group and get advice on the fine detail of the Right to Information Act. Deepesh did not say how much he was paid for this consultancy position but his role there did not appear to be very different from the work that he undertook voluntarily. Keen to be busy he tries to do as much as possible;

'Whenever an NGO calls I go and speak. My friends at IIT Delhi have called me and I have spoken to the students. Anything to keep the grey cells working [...]. (laughing) I talk to anyone who is willing to hear me'

Deepesh epitomises the energetic retired and independent activist, upper middle class and management oriented. His interest in transparency and accountability is, like many activists, focused on what Steven Sampson calls 'systems rationality' (2005, 107) in which mechanisms such as the Right to Information or E-Governance are incorporated into a set of techno-managerial solutions to the problems of inefficient or corrupt public service.

Other independent, or at least financially secure, activists are involved voluntarily with organised NGOs and movement groups. In Delhi I encountered two closely interconnected NGOs working on transparency and accountability issues that depend

¹⁰⁹ Public Sector Undertakings are companies in which either the state or central government owns an over 51% share.

almost entirely on the voluntary work of retired people from the middle classes and elite; people such as Colonel Das.

I first met the Colonel at a press conference for the release of a report on corruption that the NGO that he volunteered for had collaborated on. He is a voluble man and I had many chances to speak to him at the office of the NGO. He was also one of those people that I would meet coincidentally in the offices of other organisations. As with some other figures in my field that might unexpectedly attend the same meeting as me or appear at a conference, Colonel Das' presence could act as confirmation that I was in the right place. He is one of several volunteers that work for the NGO, all of them having formerly held senior, and in some cases very senior, positions in the civil service and military.

Colonel Das described himself as a 'quality person'. In the latter part of his career he had been involved in the defence procurement process and in organising the quality control of equipment. He continued to be interested in promoting quality service in the public and private sector and in providing training, particularly to the lower levels of the civil service. After the army he had worked in marketing and on the privatisation of the electricity supply companies in Delhi, and since starting to volunteer with the NGO he had had the opportunity to contribute to the Administrative Reforms Commission report on Ethics in Governance (Government of India, 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission 2007). The problem, he said, was of culture. Laughing he told me about the 'Hindu theory of corruption' repeating an aphorism that I had heard from others; 'the first thing a man does in the morning is bribe his god' referring to the practice of making an offering before starting the day's business (field notes December 18th 2006 also see (Singh 1975, 10)). During the course of his career he said that he had seen 'packets' politely passed across desks to secure deals and that '*Babus*' (civil servants) had become so used to not being questioned that it is no surprise that they are confused when suddenly, through mechanisms such as the Right to Information or citizens charters, they have been told that they should 'entertain' complaints. But he added, at the same time the officials can also reasonably claim, and often do, that they

themselves are victims of an inflexible system. Thus he argued systems, and a great deal of training, needed to be put in place that would allow people inside the government to stop pulling in different directions and start working for the public.

Reproducing the development ‘project-speak’ prevalent in global efforts to promote governance (Sampson 1996, 123), people like himself, the colonel said, would have a role ‘training the trainers’. He added that it was important to engage with those in the civil service who supported this type of change saying; ‘we should work with the government against the government’ (Both quotes from fieldnotes, September 25th 2006). The Colonel also has a part time role as a consultant for distance learning courses on business ethics and marketing run by a Mumbai based management institute. Like Deepesh he is focused on training for systems and management, but also on connecting people and marketing ideas to them.

The colonel relates his activism directly to an indigenous concept of social service, particularly as he is part of a family headed by a, now deceased, freedom fighter, Gandhian activist and member of the *Sarvodaya* movement. Talking about his work the Colonel sometimes expressed his frustration at the slow pace of change, or at the problems that the NGO he volunteered for had with accessing funding and networking with other groups. But he remained sure that his work was essential and paraphrasing a popular passage from the Bhagavadgita concerning *niskamakarma* (selfless endeavour) (Sharma 2003, 34) he would tell me that it was important to ‘keep doing work without expecting (it to bear) fruit’ (fieldnotes, September 25th 2006).

For other members of the NGO that Colonel Das is connected with selfless service and sacrifice is performed through peaceful protest. Visiting their fortnightly Sunday protest I met members of the Gandhian *Satyagraha* Brigade camped outside the gate of the Gandhi *Samadhi* (cremation place) at Rajghat. *Satyagraha* is the Gandhian method of non-violent protest. Led by S.D. Sharma, ‘Sharmaji’, a veteran freedom fighter who was imprisoned by the British government for civil disobedience, and by the Indian government for the same reason during the Emergency, the brigade, almost all upper

middle class men over 60 years old, would sit quietly beneath a *pandal* (a cotton awning) emblazoned with the legend ‘*Satyagraha* Against Political Corruption’ as the traffic roared past on the ring road. On a low dais in the centre of the *pandal* the *satyagrahis* for that day would sit wearing black armbands and allowed only to accept water for the hours of the protest.



(The Gandhian Satyagraha Brigade pandal opposite the gate of the Gandhi Smriti, September 2007. Photograph: Martin Webb)

Despite their solemn purpose the *satyagrahis* did not take themselves too seriously. The atmosphere would always be convivial, with jokes being made and the Sunday papers discussed, and my visits to the protest were always a pleasure. At the *satyagraha* camp I would meet faces familiar to me from the office of the NGO led by Sharmaji. The NGO does community development work in rural areas close to Delhi but also campaigns on political corruption, in particular attempting to get a 40 year old law instituting a parliamentary ombudsman (the *Lokpal* Bill) passed through parliament, and the assets of politicians with criminal records seized. Despite the mild mannered and somewhat geriatric nature of their protest the NGO is actually very well connected.

It has members from the elite levels of Indian society, sends representatives to the civil society consultations of the Administrative Reforms Commission and has participated in high profile and successful campaigns on judicial accountability and democratic reform.

As with Colonel Das, who is part of this network, time spent working for the government has provided these older activists with a wealth of useful experience, social and cultural capital, contacts, and with pensions that help to support their activist work. Without this backing these NGOs would not be able to function. From my first contact with these NGOs in 2005 and throughout my field work, a lack of funds remained an issue. As the secretary of one of the NGOs told me when we first met again in 2006 ‘we have no money, we only have our influence’ (field notes, January 19th 2006).

These grey activists then are able to stay engaged with activism through the money that their pensions and professional contacts provide. While committed to their social work they do not have to depend on it for their main source of income. Thus for these members of the transparency and accountability activism scene livelihoods are not so tied to involvement in particular activist networks or to particular leaders. This is not the case for others involved in the scene, an issue to which I now turn.

The Meaning of Fellowship: Leaders, Fellows and Social Entrepreneurs in the Right to Information Activism Scene.

Within the Right to Information scene selfless service and commitment are celebrated in the life stories of leading activists that have given up coveted formal sector jobs in the elite levels of the civil services in order to devote themselves to full time activism, or have decided not to follow conventional career paths after having received top class educations in India and abroad¹¹⁰. By publicly renouncing the materialist element of upper middle class aspiration, and by stepping outside of the formal labour market, leaders of grassroots groups from upper middle class and elite backgrounds have gained

¹¹⁰ For a published account of this phenomenon see the profile of the Uttar Pradesh based activist Sandeep Pandey (Bahn 2006).

moral authority and credibility within the activist scene while crucially retaining the social and cultural capital that their class background, work experience and education have provided them with. Leadership within the scene is predicated on this type of moral and charismatic authority, an authority that is also necessary in order to satisfy the funding requirements of the donors that fund a number of full time Right to Information activists.

As Dipankar Gupta notes, Indian society has produced a ‘profusion of Mahatmas’ (2000, 51), charismatic and driven individuals leading a host of voluntary agencies and attempting to block holes in the institutional support structure of the nation (2000, 53; 2006, 32-42). In some notable cases the work of particular individuals has been recognised with international awards. Aruna Roy of the MKSS (2000), Sandeep Pandey of *Asha Parivar* (2002)¹¹¹ and Arvind Kejriwal of *Parivartan* (2006) are all leading figures in the national Right to Information scene that have received the Ramon Magsaysay Award, often referred to in the media as ‘Asia’s Nobel Prize’. There is a considerable amount of prize money attached to the award¹¹². In Delhi Arvind Kejriwal’s award was used to set up the Public Cause Research Foundation (PCRF), an example of a ‘middle class professional support organisation’ (Sheth and Sethi 1996, 285) working alongside *Parivartan*, employing professionals to focus on legal research and public interest litigation.

Exceptional cases such as the Magsaysay awardees are indicative of a broader paradigm in funding. Across the non-governmental sector in India activists doing

¹¹¹ Sandeep Pandey of the Uttar Pradesh based *Asha Parivar* accepted the Magsaysay Award but returned the prize money after criticism that, as he is opposed to US foreign policy, he should not accept an award funded by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. See <http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/sep/04mag.htm> (accessed December 10th 2009)

¹¹² For example see ‘Activists Share Asian Nobel Prize’ at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/851034.stm> or ‘Arvind Kejriwal Selected for Magsaysay Award’ at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1832474.cms>. All links are accessible as of 24th October 2010. I have not been able to get precise details on the amount of prize money that the award carries, despite requesting the information directly from the Magsaysay Foundation. Gossip in the activist scene put the award as between \$25,000 and \$50,000, but there is no way to substantiate these figures or ascertain restrictions on how the money might be spent. Calman notes that when Ela Bhatt of the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) received the Magsaysay Award in 1977 the grant was US\$20,000 (1992, 113 n.109).

voluntary social work have been drawn into schemes set up by organisations supporting social entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, such as the Ashoka Foundation¹¹³. In such schemes funding opportunities are particularly focused on charismatic and dynamic individuals who are seen as able to facilitate local action (Leadbeater 1997, 11; Vasi 2008, 161; Grenier 2008, 199), individuals who can be ‘Changemakers’¹¹⁴ (Ashoka Foundation 2007, Ashoka Foundation 2006; Bornstein 2004, 256).

The transparency and accountability scene is well integrated into the social entrepreneurship paradigm, within which the organising principle in the relationship between donor organisations and activists is the ‘fellowship’, stipends attached to particular organisations or projects but paid directly to individuals rather than to groups. Amongst the groups that I encountered in Delhi two leading figures have already received Ashoka Fellowships and a third is undergoing the selection process as this is written in 2010. Fellowships are not restricted to leaders, although prestigious grants from organisations such as the Ashoka Foundation this would usually be the case, but are also arranged for workers lower down within groups.

The logic behind the fellowship system is fairly simple. Groups that style themselves as ‘people’s movements’ or ‘citizens groups’ are generally not willing to accept institutional funding, particularly from foreign sources, and do not want to register formally as NGOs, in order to remain flexible and free from the suggestion that they are working for particular interests. But individual activists working in these groups must sustain themselves and for many it is the fellowship system that enables this. Activists may be given fellowships by individual philanthropic donors, by NGOs inside India that are registered under the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA) (1976)¹¹⁵,

¹¹³ See <http://www.ashoka.org/>

¹¹⁴ See the Ashoka Foundation fellows webpage at <http://www.ashoka.org/search/fellows?country=IN> and the website www.changemakers.com/en-us (accessed December 8th 2009). In 2007 the Ashoka Foundation ran a competition for civil society organisations promoting transparency under their trademarked Changemakers banner. The competition offered funding for the winner. Four of the groups that I knew from Delhi entered although none received any funding from the competition.

¹¹⁵ Tandon notes that the FCRA was enacted during the Emergency to be implemented by the Central Ministry for Internal Security as part of the government’s response to the activities of

and by donors overseas. FCRA registered donor NGOs within India may in turn receive funds from a variety of external sources (Bornstein 2006, 170). One Delhi based organisation that funds groups at the *sangathan* level inside and outside the transparency scene has donors as diverse as the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), Oxfam, Pepsi, and Honeywell the civil and military aerospace manufacturer. Connections such as these might be made explicit by the FCRA registered NGO, and can easily be traced through internet research. It is worth noting that *sangathans* might not be willing to accept funds directly from large corporate or development donors such as these for reasons of politics, independence or political correctness. But, the funds that large donors provide can be effectively cleansed by passing through the FCRA registered Indian donor NGO, before being transferred as fellowships to workers at the grassroots.

Funds and fellowships such as these are provided to those working at the lower levels of the scene with a specific aim of empowering individuals who might otherwise only engage with grassroots groups as clients. As the director of an Indian FCRA registered NGO that provides fellowships to grassroots workers in the transparency scene told me, his organisation exists specifically to develop and support leadership amongst those from among the ‘weakest in society’ in order that they might understand and communicate citizenship and rights to others in their communities. He contrasted the fellowships that his NGO provides with those from the Ashoka Foundation saying that Ashoka fellowships are ‘only for the educated’ (interview July 4th 2007).

A number of the Right to Information activists that I encountered were funded through fellowships from the US based organisations AID (Association for India’s Development), *Asha*, and the India Friends Association (IFA). Fundraising efforts for these groups are based in the Indian diaspora in the US, often organised through Non-Resident Indian (NRI) associations on university and information technology

Gandhian and other voluntary associations that were seen to be supporting the opposition movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan (2002, 11).

corporation campuses. The same associations that we saw Arvind Kejriwal presenting Right to Information success stories to in the last chapter.

Applications for fellowships to these donors follow a fairly transparent procedure. A variety of documents including original applications, nomination forms, and progress reports on the activities of fellows are available online. However, an essential part of the application process is the ability of a potential fellow to obtain the recommendation of a leading figure in the Right to Information scene in India, a trusted name that can vouch for the nominee. As the India Friends Association website puts it;

‘IFA Fellowships – are grants to committed young men and women who have some educational background and/or experience on issues of interest to IFA. *These are given on the recommendation of respected and well known individuals.* The grant is a one year commitment and covers reasonable living expenses including housing and related travel. It may be renewed for another two years if all specific requirements are met’ (IFA, 2004-2009, my emphasis)

And *Asha* uses a similar process;

‘Asha supports a fellowship program that supports individuals of the highest quality and unquestionable dedication. Support is given to those whose work in time will have a large positive impact by creating an institution or a methodology. *Fellowships are reviewed after the potential fellow has been nominated by a nominator actively working in India.*’ (Asha, 1991-2009, my emphasis)

Although there is care taken to make the paper application processes for organisations such as IFA or *Asha* transparent, there is in the fellowship system what Morris-Jones would call ‘a cement of informality that holds together the formal bricks’ of the process (1963, 142); the decision by a respected individual working in the scene to nominate a co-worker for a fellowship remains an informal one. Although documents relating to fellowships may be freely available on the internet the capacity of a nominator to support a fellowship application remains an expression of a social relationship and, essentially, of an asymmetry of power between nominator and nominee.

Although fellowships are paid to individual activists it may not be possible for an activist to take a fellowship with them when they leave one group for another. In 2007 when three members of a Right to Information *sangathan* in Delhi left to form their own organisation doing similar work the fellowship that one of them received through the group did not go with him and he had to seek new sources of funding (interview with *sangathan* worker on 19th September 2007). The fellowship remained with the network clustered around the leader who had supported the original nomination. Thus although fellowships are paid to individuals, they are provided to support the work of particular groups.

This consolidation of money and influence around particular leaders is part of what Rita was talking about (in chapter 7) when she said that power relationships in the activist scene had changed since she had been closely involved with it. She complained that class differences within the ‘movement’ had been magnified by the ability of some upper middle class individuals to attract funding. That said it is worth remembering that the amounts given for fellowships are comparatively modest in monetary terms, particularly to educated upper middle class activists, for whom working for fellowship money may be perceived as a demonstration of selfless service and sacrifice. However, for some working at the base of the grassroots the amounts paid through fellowships may be significant, and their access to these funds not particularly secure.

Activism as Informal Employment.

For small *sangathans* the urge to remain authentically and informally grassroots by avoiding professionalisation or institutionalisation means that full time grassroots workers receiving salaries or compensation for their time are kept in a state of informal employment. This is particularly true for lower level *sangathan karyakarte* (social workers), those with less economic, social and cultural capital, such as Anand and the community mobilisers in the south Delhi *sangathan*.

I never saw a figure written down for how much those working for the south Delhi *sangathan* earned. In July 2007 Anand told me;

‘(an FCRA registered NGO) gives funding for all, for office- 1,000 for stationary, 1,000 for telephone, 1500 for travel, 3,000 for office rent. (then in fellowships) Aditi gets 7500¹¹⁶, Padma, Shalini, and Savitri get 1500 each. Mine is 3,000. Then in that some more is added from the *sangathan* (from donations), like I get 6,300, Aditi gets 15,675/- her travel expenses of Maruti (car), are more as compared to my 10km per litre bike. Her phone expenses are more too.

Martin- so Shalini, Savitri and Padma have fellowships?

Anand- (the NGO) gives 1500 (for each), and some the *sangathan* gives (from donations), total is somewhere around 2,000¹¹⁷.’ (From a field recording made on 5th July 2007 transcribed by Uzma Azhar. All figures are monthly amounts)

Kamal, my research assistant then asked about Lalit, a man from a local *basti* who had been working as a community mobiliser for the *sangathan* and had lost his paid position after going off to his native village in Rajasthan for a month without asking for leave;

‘Kamal- What about Lalit, he was here earlier?

Anand- Yes, he was but something happened. Whosoever it may be, either you or me, when we join an organization/office or anything, we have a responsibility towards its work. In Delhi, two things are of great value, one commitment, and second, time. Human beings have no value, they come and go; so whoever works on these two things will go a long way in life. We were working on (a *sangathan* campaign). I was alone and without informing you (meaning Lalit) leave for a month? Then some action will have to be taken.’ (field recording 5th July 2007 transcribed and translated by Uzma Azhar)

Kamal had asked this question because we had spent some time with Lalit in the previous month and he had told us about his trouble. Lalit is a slight man apparently in late middle age. He said that he had previously worked as a *mistry* (skilled construction

¹¹⁶ As I understand it the money from Aditi’s fellowship was passed on to Anita for the work that she did for the *sangathan*.

¹¹⁷ The figure I quoted from Padma in chapter 5 of Rs.50-60/day would roughly confirm what Anand told me, an amount well below the minimum wage for unskilled government workers in 2006-7 of around Rs.3500 (Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi 2010).

worker) but said that nowadays he was not able to keep up the work physically. Anyway, he told us, there was not as much work as there had been. He had been involved with the *sangathan* for about 1 and half years and had been paid around Rs.1900 – 2100 a month, but after his unauthorised trip to Rajasthan this had stopped. He continued to attend meetings and the offices voluntarily during the week and said that he received some compensation if he performed special duties such as helping to file an RTI or attending a hearing. He told us that Aditi had said that she would consider taking him back full time. He also asked me if I could help him find a job in an office, even if it was not doing ‘NGO’ work (Taken from simultaneous separate field notes by Martin Webb and Kamal Misra, 13th June 2007).

As with the other community mobilisers Lalit’s commitment to the *sangathan* is not entirely financially motivated. Like the other community mobilisers he said how working with the *sangathan* had provided him with valuable *jaankari* (knowledge and experience), a point that he used when asking if I knew of any office jobs that he might do. But the money that he had previously earned for his work with the *sangathan* had made a significant contribution to his family’s income, adding to the money that his wife earned doing domestic work in middle class households. This was also the case for the other female community mobilisers whose husbands faced periodic unemployment, and even for the educated Anand who, despite being very committed to his work cited finances as part of his reason for returning to the *sangathan* after he had left briefly to become a *pradhan* in Durga Camp (see chapter 6).

For the people at the lowest income level of the Right to Information scene the informal nature of the financial organisation of the scene, and the focus on commitment, leaves them vulnerable to decisions to exclude them from the group and the income, however small, that it provides. It is worth remembering that what can be presented as examples of grassroots collective action, of commitment and political engagement by people involved in ‘movements’ might from some perspectives also be viewed as work and a livelihood.

To explore this idea further I will introduce case studies from a different level in the transparency activism scene, looking at a new generation of young up and coming middle class activists who have built careers within the activist and NGO fields. Can we consider them “professional” activists even though they have to work within a field discursively framed as being organised around informal voluntarism? I will explore this by focusing on three young middle class activists, Sahila, Sanjay and Anya.

Patrons, Clients and Fellows.

I first encountered Sahila and Sanjay at a day long meeting in central Delhi. This was very early in my fieldwork when I was seeking initial contacts with activist groups. I had gone to the meeting on the recommendation of an informant at an international NGO and found myself in a room full of activists from around the country who had come to the city to plan for an upcoming campaign. The campaign was being coordinated by a Delhi based network of Right to Information focused groups and Sahila and Sanjay were helping to organise the day. Neither of them had leading or speaking roles at the meeting but both were busy behind the scenes making sure that the proceedings ran smoothly. It was clear that they were both very used to this role and very familiar with the themes being covered, spending more time outside of the room organising the logistics of the day than they did listening to the presentations. This was a role that I saw them both performing at numerous meetings during my fieldwork, always busy and rarely listening directly to the main speaker.

At the time that we met both Sahila and Sanjay were drawing salaries from *Soochna Khabar* (Information News), the foreign funded NGO associated with the Right to Information movement which held the public audit of its accounts in chapter 7. Sahila and Sanjay left *Soochna Khabar* at almost the same time in the late summer of 2006 and it is what happened to them next that will concern us here. And what about Anya? I met Anya through Sanjay and I will return to her in more detail when talking about

Sanjay as their stories are woven together professionally and emotionally¹¹⁸. I will begin with Sahila¹¹⁹.

Sahila.

During the early part of her life Sahila lived abroad. Her father was an engineer for the Birla Industries group in South East Asia. At the age of eight she returned to India for a high class education, first at a leading private convent school before going on to an elite ladies college of Delhi University. After university she spent half a year living in Mumbai with her sister and interning for an NRI funded website focused on music, film and fashion, but she did not like the ‘hoity-toity glitterati crowd’ that she found herself with and decided that she wanted to get out of India for a while to study.

Her father managed to secure her a scholarship from the Birla Group to pay for a two year Masters in Business Administration at an Australian University. Sahila chose the course herself and assured me that she had been under no pressure from her parents to do an MBA. Rather she felt that it would help her to ‘prepare herself mentally’ for the social work that was her real interest.

During the course she took a variety of modules but it was the business ethics course that made the most impression. The American tutor, a radical refugee from the 1970’s Berkeley campus

‘was supposed to take business ethics but I think he just struck the business off and we just did ethics stuff, so the first term paper I wrote was on Immanuel Kant, then subsequently I wrote papers on international debt, the World Bank and the IMF [...] it

¹¹⁸ During my fieldwork in Delhi I spent more time with Sanjay than with Anya and my field notes and understanding of the chain of events reflect this. However, I did have an opportunity to spend more time with Anya during two visits that she made to the UK in 2008 and 2010 to attend workshops organised for an international research project that she has been involved in. On her second visit in 2010 we recorded a long interview in which we discussed and clarified the events from 2006-7 that I describe in this section. I am very grateful to her for this opportunity as I now realise that I had slightly overplayed a conflict that I observed in the scene and our meeting has resolved some apparent anomalies in my data.

¹¹⁹ For a detailed personal account of Sahila’s life before I met her in 2006 I have drawn on a recording of a life history interview carried out in the UK in 2009. Otherwise data is drawn from field notes and recorded interviews during fieldwork in 2006-7.

was funny because the stuff that I was reading about was happening back home in India, but I had no way to connect with it, so I was just reading [...] you know when I lived in Australia I didn't use any money that my dad gave me, I was working... so when I was leaving my Dad was saying "why didn't you spend the money?" and I said, because I had money, I didn't need it. And I think it was just this time in Australia that I got to think that I can do stuff [...] that I realised that I wanted to come back and do work (social work), and that I could do this kind of work, provided I just needed a job' (Interview August 2009)

Returning to India, and to Delhi, Sahila reconnected with networks from university. She first found work as a research assistant to a well known activist academic before moving on to a job at an institute involved in development research in Delhi's slums. The job at the institute paid Rs.10000 a month and while she was there she began volunteering for a grassroots *sangathan* within the transparency scene. As she became more involved in the work of the group, making herself useful and being noticed for her work by the leader of the group, she took on a role coordinating a *manch* (forum) for groups involved in non-governmental Right to Information activities in Delhi.

Sahila was far from a leading player in the scene, but she notes that a sign of her increasing engagement was that her mobile phone was becoming one of the places for people to call if they needed help or information, a sign that she was becoming trusted as a reliable worker by the leading figures in the group that she worked with (interview August 2009). Her personal number would be given out at public meetings as a person to call if anyone had a query about Right to Information issues or about a specific campaign. Time spent with Sahila would often be fragmented as she fielded calls day and night not just from other activists and movement leaders involved in the latest panic, but also from members of the public with the most basic enquiries about the Right to information. This accessibility, which Harsh Sethi notes is a common feature amongst those most involved in campaigning organisations (1998, 409), says much about the engagement of people such as Sahila in the activist scene. The focus on informality and commitment tends to collapse the separation between public and

private roles. Committed activists are always on; always in fire-fighting mode ready to respond to emergencies or demands, particularly from leading figures within the scene.

Sahila was also being noticed because of her interest in this type of ‘ground level’ work despite her class and educational background. She recalled how she had been asked to help Manju an ex diplomat and influential supporter of the Right to Information campaign, to file a Right to Information application:

‘Sahila: Then Manju came on the scene, and she was friends with Aruna (Roy), and I was asked ‘will you go with her and help her and show her how to do it’... And she (Manju) got impressed and said ‘my god you’re so young and [they] told me that you’ve done an MBA but you’re doing this kind of work? We need more people like you’.

Martin: well you see, you’ve renounced... (I mean that she has not tried to follow what might be considered a typical upper middle class/MBA graduate life path)

Sahila: yeah it was exactly like that, but you know it’s funny, it’s so strange that if you do (follow an unconventional course), that you acquire some sense of... you know, as if you’re more dedicated than anyone else who doesn’t (laughs at the idea). So Manju and I used to interact and talk a lot [...] and then we did a whole bunch of research (together) and Aruna got to hear about it and then everyone else heard about it’
(Interview, August 2009)

At this point Sahila was still working for the research institute but then she got an opportunity to bring her paid work and her voluntary work together. A Canadian Government agency was funding research into community action in slums.

Sahila: ‘it was interesting because when we did the (Canadian) work nobody in the research part of [the institute] was interested in it because this was more an action oriented research, they didn’t want to come to the slum, and we did this in peak summer with open sewers and all of that [...] so the (Canadian agency) was really happy because I was 23 and I’d coordinated this whole project that no one else was interested in doing

Martin: and so the project was...?

Sahila: looking at community action and service delivery, so, do people in the community mobilise to address service delivery issues? In fact during that work we got

in touch with a lot of people because we came up against a situation where they were going to remove one of the slums so I said ok we need to go and see the chief minister, and because of some of the work with the PDS¹²⁰ I had gotten to know the special officer on deputation to the CM of Delhi, and he was... you know how it is in India: 'oh young girl wants to do research, well educated, working on these ground level issues', so he would give me audience every time.' (Interview August 2009)

Sahila's matter of fact description of her engagement with the scene is revealing. First because of the way that people's reaction to her choice as an educated upper middle class woman to be involved in this type of social work seems to open doors for her; and second because of the way that she develops her own profile and at the same time furthers the work of the grassroots group she volunteers for by connecting an internationally funded research project to their area. She has made herself very useful and, although money does not accrue directly to the grassroots group as a result, Sahila does effectively manage to use her salary and coordinating role in the Canadian project as a resource for the group.

When *Soochna Khabar* came into existence in the latter half of 2005 Sahila was one of those who had worked on the successful funding application to a major international donor. The NGO drew its director and core team from members/volunteers of the grassroots *sangathan*, and Sahila left the research institute and started work at the NGO on a salary of Rs.25000. She did not have a precise job description but the original funding proposal to *Soochna Khabar*'s principal donor shows her as a member of the governing body and of the 'core team' and gives a brief resume of her qualifications for the post including past research and coordinating roles in activist networks. The suggestion in the document is that she will continue these coordinating roles under the auspices of *Soochna Khabar* (Unpublished document, 2005¹²¹), which is exactly what she was doing when I first met her.

¹²⁰ She is referring to the work that the grassroots group had been doing to try to combat corruption in the Targeted Public Distribution System (see chapter 4) in Delhi.

¹²¹ I have an electronic copy of the original funding proposal and breakdown of costs etc. from 2005 for *Soochna Khabar* that was provided for me by Sahila.

Up to this point Sahila's trajectory through the scene has taken her from working as a social science researcher and grassroots *sangathan* volunteer to working for a professional NGO for a decent salary. Her demonstrated commitment to activist work has provided the opportunity to make a professional move through the scene, and one which has connected her to a major donor. Even though she is a little non-plussed by the attention her educational qualifications and her choice of work have gained her from leading figures in the movement they have made her eminently suitable for taking part in the work of setting up an organisation such as *Soochna Khabar*. Her formal paid work has also provided her with the means to live an independent life in the city, but this is a life structured by the informally organised round the clock demands of activism. Activism penetrates far into Suchi's personal life and her trajectory within the scene depends on her willingness to sustain this connection through hard work and commitment.

Sanjay, Anya and Yuva Kriya (Youth Action).

Now let us follow Sanjay up to point at which he joined *Soochna Khabar*. During my fieldwork I had many opportunities to see Sanjay at work, performing tasks for others as well as in his efforts to build the profile of his own nascent activist group. But when I came to analyse my field data I realised that in our conversations he had been very focused on the future, talking about his ambitions within the transparency scene and his hopes for his project. However, some biographical details did emerge from our conversations and fortunately, due to the transparency policies of some of the funding groups that Sanjay has applied to for fellowships, it is possible to access his curriculum vitae and other documents online and piece together his route through the scene.

Sanjay is originally from Uttar Pradesh. He is confident and charismatic, not afraid to speak his mind and with a keen eye for networking opportunities and intra scene power relations. While he is fluent in English he is more comfortable and confident speaking Hindi. In this respect we might contrast Sanjay with Sahila. While they are both of the middle classes, Sanjay's father was a scientist employed by the Government of India, Sahila is from the elite end of the spectrum, speaking English as a first language and

familiar with the canon of English literature through her school and university education. Sanjay is more from the middle of the middle classes. Well educated but more familiar with a Hindi canon and set of cultural references.

Sanjay was in his late 20's when I met him and had been living and working in Delhi since 2004. He had studied for a Bachelors Degree in Commerce in Uttar Pradesh, following it with a Masters degree in Social Work, and started to work for an NGO in Uttar Pradesh focusing on women's health and female foeticide. After moving to Delhi he worked for an internationally funded NGO, again focused on female reproductive health, but also on child labour and racism. It was in 2005 that he began working in the transparency and accountability scene as a coordinator for the south Delhi *sangathan* that we encountered in chapter 6. Although he developed some good contacts while he was there he gave me the impression that he was not happy with his role in the *sangathan* and moved on quickly, joining *Soochna Khabar* in late 2005 at a salary of Rs.15000 a month.

Thus up to this point Sanjay had been employed mostly in professional NGOs and seemed to be building a career in that area. But, while working with *Soochna Khabar* he had been involved in coordinating a campaign to get university students and other young people involved in transparency and accountability activism. The campaign had seen some success during 2006, and he wanted to develop the idea further. Along with some close friends, in particular a young woman called Anya, Sanjay began a group called *Yuva Kriya* (Youth Action) attempting to preserve the momentum of youth and student involvement in the successful campaign against attempts by the government to amend the Right to Information Act¹²².

Anya is from a middle class Bengali family and grew up in Kolkata, but had been living in Delhi since she had come to the city to do a masters degree in Psychology. After a spell working in what she called 'the corporate sector' she had become dissatisfied and

¹²² For details of the broader campaign against the amendment of the Act in 2006, in particular the attempt to exempt 'file notings', the comments made by officials in the margins of files as it passes through the system, see Nayak (2009). As of 2009 there is another attempt underway by the Government of India to amend the act, and another campaign against the plan see <http://aidindia.org/main/content/view/1128/408/> (accessed December 23rd 2009)

managed to get a more development oriented job doing ‘labour auditing’ in factories producing garments for export. She had met Sanjay in 2004 just before he had started working at the south Delhi *sangathan*. Their friendship had continued while he was there and Anya had spent some time volunteering informally with the *sangathan* and attending some of the early meetings of the *mahila mandal*. Her connection with the *sangathan* had been mostly through Sanjay, she only met Aditi on a couple of occasions, and after she found a job at an internationally funded NGO focused on conflict prevention and resolution based in south Delhi she found that she did not have much time to offer anyway. However her connection to the activism scene continued through her friendship with Sanjay as he moved on from the south Delhi *sangathan* to take a position at *Soochna Khabar*, and she continued to volunteer with what she calls ‘the movement’ when she had spare time.

Yuva Kriya was officially launched at a meeting at Delhi University in early September 2006 at which the keynote speaker was a leading civil servant, and Ashoka Foundation fellow, famous for her campaigning from within government (field notes and recording, September 2006), and with the support of leading members of the national Right to Information campaign. Sanjay’s work at *Soochna Khabar* gave him some financial security but seeing potential in the *Yuva Kriya* project he wanted to develop his own space in the transparency and accountability scene. In the latter half of 2006, after a particularly intense period of campaigning that had placed all concerned under great pressure, and strained relations with the director of *Soochna Khabar*, both Sahila and Sanjay decided that they would leave, apparently to equally uncertain futures.

At the time I remember being surprised at their apparent room for manoeuvre. It is not common for people in India, or anywhere else for that matter, to leave a paying job without some confidence that they will be able to find the means to live, and I had seen financial concerns acting as a constraint for grassroots workers in other organisations, for example in the south Delhi *Sangathan*¹²³. Sanjay and Sahila had different plans for

¹²³ See the story in chapter 5 about Anand and his decision to remain at the Sangathan after he had won the position of Pradhan in Durga Camp.

the future; Sanjay in creating his own space within the networks of transparency and accountability activism, and Sahila more interested in a change of scene, which effectively meant a change of patrons, a move away from the local Right to Information scene in Delhi to work for the ‘movement’ at the national level.

The issue of financial security was on Sanjay’s mind. He pointed out to me that even leading figures in the scene who had given up high ranking positions in the government had done so with relative comfort as they had not moved until they knew that other funding was secure, or that they had the backing of other connections such as the income of family members (fieldnotes, June 3rd 2007). To a lesser extent this was also the case for Sanjay. He shared a simple government built flat in a lower middle class area of the city with his brother, who earned a good salary as a teacher at a business school, and following the grassroots activist ethos he lived simply and concentrated on his work. But even taking that into account leaving *Soochna Khabar* still required an entrepreneurial faith in his ability to make his way in the scene.

In Sahila’s case perhaps it is fair to say that she left *Soochna Khabar* in a stronger position. Not seeking to make her own space in the movement and with her elite education and reputation for hard work she was not floating free for long. Within a very short time she had been asked if she would take over a coordinating role in the national Right to Information campaign, supported by an Rs.10000 fellowship from an NRI donor organisation in the US, a role which had previously been held by Aditi of the South Delhi *Sangathan*. The fellowship was organised on the recommendation of a national level ‘movement’ leader from outside Delhi into whose sphere of the scene Sahila had effectively moved. The role connected Suchi much more to the national leaders of the Right to Information scene, allowing her to work with them when they were visiting Delhi in a way that she had not been doing before. It also involved some travel within India and internationally. Suchi, with her familiarity with travelling outside India, fluency in English and experience of working on activist research into World Bank sponsored initiatives in India, was a reliable person to be able to deal with discussions at international meetings and conferences.

Things were a little more difficult for Sanjay. He had to decide what might be the right kind of support to make the development of his plan possible. This task was shaped by a concern that the *Yuva Kriya* project that he and Anya were working on should have some breathing space to develop, and that they did not want to be steered by the demands of donors or patrons. He had managed to secure Rs.5000 a month for his personal expenses from a small charitable foundation based in Delhi. They had also offered some office space but it was in an elite area of central south Delhi and Sanjay could not see the point of trying to run an office from that location or at this early stage of the development of *Yuva Kriya*. He continued to operate from the flat that he shared with his brother in east Delhi. Anya was still living in the south of the city and working for the south Delhi based development NGO.

Observing the way that groups interacted in conference situations such as the SAHR meeting (see chapter 7) it was clear that Sanjay and Anya, and thus *Yuva Kriya*, remained close to particular sections of the Delhi Right to Information network (field notes June 17th and 21st 2007). Sanjay and Anya were conscious of these associations, and with good reason: at an interview with a manager at a social entrepreneurship foundation in which I mentioned *Yuva Kriya* she referred to the group as the ‘youth wing’ of a particular *sangathan* in the Delhi Right to Information scene and attributed its existence, in the jargon of social entrepreneurship, entirely to the leader of the *sangathan*’s ‘amazing’ strategy for scaling up their network (Field notes August 6th 2007). But there was little that Sanjay and Anya could do to change the situation.

At the beginning of 2007 the *sangathan* leader had acted as the nominator for two fellowships, one each for Sanjay and Anya, from a US based NRI funding organisation. Each fellowship was attached to a different project proposal written under the *Yuva Kriya* name. One was to provide training in English and computer literacy to children in an east Delhi slum, to be run by Anya, the other to create awareness of transparency issues and legal tools amongst university students, to be run by Sanjay. Unfortunately there had been a long delay in the money coming through which was causing Sanjay

and Anya difficulties. Sanjay because he wanted to get on with the work with a little more security, and Anya because she had told her employer, perhaps a little prematurely, that she would be getting a fellowship and leaving to work full time for *Yuva Kriya*.

The contacts and access to resources that the *sangathan* leader could offer were valuable to Sanjay and Anya, but left them with obligations. For example, when the senior civil servant who the *sangathan* leader had asked to speak at the *Yuva Kriya* launch a few months earlier was passed over for promotion to an important position in the city, activists associated with the *sangathan* network, including members of *Yuva Kriya* organised a ‘spontaneous’ peaceful street protest against the decision by slum-dwellers and students (Field notes, August 1st 2007). Sanjay and Anya had not been at all happy about attaching *Yuva Kriya* to this but felt that they had an obligation to contribute.

In an attempt to create their own space in the scene Sanjay and Anya were also maintaining contacts with other leading activists. In November 2006 Sanjay had some success in organising a meeting at the Indian Social Forum at which he managed to get senior activist figures from outside Delhi to lend their support and speak (field notes, 11th November 2006) and secured an interview with *Doordarshan* news¹²⁴ after the meeting. He and Anya had also done work for different people in the activist network under the *Yuva Kriya* name, travelling outside Delhi to Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to help on single issue campaigns or social audits that required expertise in using the Right to Information. Mostly the work was done as favours to people connected to the wider Right to Information movement and Anya told me that they had not been paid, only receiving subsistence for the time they spent away (interview, 7th July 2010). They had not asked for money because as Anya puts it ‘money gets complicated’ (interview July 7th 2010). *Yuva Kriya* did manage to secure some consultancy work with a large rights advocacy NGO, and another fellowship of Rs.5-6000 came from a youth volunteer organisation, but Sanjay said that he had passed this on to a young volunteer who was

¹²⁴ *Doordarshan* is the Government of India television news service.

doing some freelance web design work for the group. Sanjay described how he was trying to work in between patrons to sustain the group and maintain good relations with the influential people in the wider Right to Information movement. He had a great deal of respect for the different leaders of the movement and wanted to be of assistance in their different projects, but did not want to be too closely associated with any particular part of the activist scene in order that *Yuva Kriya* might properly develop its own space (field notes January 23rd 2007).

Waiting for their fellowship money to arrive had caused Sanjay and Anya a great deal of uncertainty, but a visit to Delhi by a representative of their US based donor organisation in July 2007 managed to reassure them a little. Anya described how she had told him that she hoped it wouldn't be so much trouble every month as she has rent to pay. He had told them that they would receive the money soon and that each payment would cover a few months so she should not worry. Donor organisation documents show that the fellowships finally began in August 2007 and after a site visit and review in 2009 have been renewed into 2010. In the life of the project to early 2010 together the two fellowships have amounted to just under US\$30,000 (approximately Rs.1,347,698 at time of writing). Anya told me that from this money, around Rs.30,000 per month between them, Sanjay and Anya draw their day to day expenses, but also provide expenses for running their Right to Information awareness projects.

I am adding two fellowships together in this instance because Sanjay and Anya married in 2008 making the running of *Yuva Kriya* a family affair. The donor's 2009 site visit report concludes that their projects have been successful, recommends further funding, and suggests that one part of the project, educating young working class people about the Right to Information might be funded independently. Perhaps this marks the beginning of the scaling up of *Yuva Kriya* and evidence of its development as an independent part of the Right to Information movement. In our interview in 2010 Anya made it clear that it was time that they accessed extra funding to help run the projects, and that they now felt more comfortable about doing this as they had successfully created their own space in the scene.

Just before I left Delhi at the end of my field work I got an opportunity to see Sanjay presenting his work, and perhaps a confirmation that he and Anya were finally making space for themselves in ‘the movement’. At the end of September 2007 Right to Information activists from around the country gathered in Delhi. Grassroots groups, independent activists, NGO workers and a number of state and central Information Commissioners assembled at a site on the outskirts of the city for three days of discussion and presentations. The event effectively marked the end of my fieldwork, I left India two weeks later, and so the meeting provided an opportunity to see many of the people that I had spent time with gathered together for the last time. Sahila, in her new position, was centrally involved in the organisation of the meeting, but essentially doing what she had been when I had first met her in 2006. Working very hard behind the scenes to help things go smoothly, only this time for a different set of movement leaders, new patrons for an up and coming protégée. Sanjay and Anya were also there and on the last day Sanjay got the opportunity to speak about *Yuva Kriya*’s work, sharing the stage with a number of leading activists, and receiving thanks from one for help that he and Anya had provided on a human rights case in Bihar. Seeing Sanjay standing on stage making his pitch for *Yuva Kriya* only amounted to 5 minutes of meeting time, and he was one voice amongst many who spoke that day. But his presence did seem to act as a declaration of independence, of the successful creation of a new space in the movement and with it perhaps the beginning of a shift in power from older figures to new rising stars.

To conclude: In this chapter I have shown how transparency and accountability activists organise finances and resources to ensure that their projects continue. For upper middle class ‘grey’ activists with relatively secure retirement incomes activism can be a hobby, although one that is taken seriously as selfless service. For younger middle class activists it is necessary to seek funding, or those who can access funding, that will allow them to build careers through connection to the activist scene. Middle class activists are more mobile within the scene and are valued for their education and literacy. In some cases they may even be applauded by their peers for their sacrifice in

rejecting a conventional middle class life path, and working for the social good. For *sangathan karyakarte* from the informal working classes, commitment to activist work is not bought by the minimal financial rewards that it offers to them. However, the ability of *sangathan* leaders with access to the ‘policy’ level of the scene to organise funding for their work can make a significant difference to otherwise marginal livelihoods. Thus a focus on funding shows us again how the transparency and accountability activist scene reproduces the class boundaries and spatialised hierarchies of the city even as it works to transcend them.

The discursive construction of the scene as an informal space in which trust is earned by demonstrating commitment to activist projects produces a transnational fellowship system in which funding is accessed through recommendations. As we saw in earlier chapters how activists often act as brokers, albeit honest ones, in helping people to access the state, here activist leaders act as patrons offering access to funds. The informal organisation of the scene also returns us to questions of transparency and accountability. Perhaps it is fair to say that activists are only as transparent about how resources are organised in the scene as they can be. Paper trails concerning fellowships can be followed, even if the recommendation for a fellowship remains a personal matter. But, despite the very good intentions of many in the scene, the messy connections and complications of the social life of activism mean that a great deal remains hidden from view. Activists could devote more time to documenting flows of resources, but to capture even a small amount of the informal connections that make things happen in the scene would leave time for little else. In the end perhaps this is a job better attempted by anthropologists.

Chapter 9: Conclusion: Ground Realities and Boundary Paradoxes.

In mid September 2007, a month before I finished fieldwork and returned to the UK I went on a two day trip to Rajasthan with an activist friend from Delhi. She had arranged a meeting with Aruna Roy of the MKSS. This involved attending a campaign meeting in Jaipur where we would meet MKSS activists before returning with Aruna to the Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) campus¹²⁵ in Tilonia. After the meeting had finished around 10 of us squeezed into the SWRC four-wheel drive that had brought the MKSS activists from Tilonia. We drove to the office of a local Right to Information campaign group to have some tea and a samosa before leaving Jaipur. As we bumped through the town Shanker Singh, one of the founder members of the MKSS, asked me what I was doing there. Shanker is the lead performer in the street theatre, singing and puppet performances that accompany MKSS actions. He is a natural comedian and as I never saw him miss an opportunity to find some humour in a situation I was not expecting an easy ride. I told him that I was a PhD student. With a broad grin he said that he knew a good story about a PhD student, adding that this was also for the benefit of my friend from Delhi, who was planning to start her own academic research project. The story went as follows:

One day a villager is out in the fields herding his sheep. A PhD student carrying a laptop computer comes to him and tells the villager that he is going to do research about the local people and the area, and that the research will be useful for the villager because he will learn new things about his environment. The villager says ‘OK, fine, but if you can tell me anything I don’t already know then I’ll give you one of my sheep. Perhaps you can begin by counting them’ he suggests.

So the student counts the sheep, and makes maps of the land, and prepares impressive charts and graphs and tables. When he’s finished he shows these to the villager on his computer. The villager says ‘here’s something I didn’t already know, I have one more

¹²⁵ The Social Work Resource Centre (SWRC) is an internationally funded NGO, headed by Aruna Roy’s husband Sanjit “Bunker” Roy, and based in rural Rajasthan. See <http://www.barefootcollege.org/default.asp> for more details.

sheep than I thought, so choose one and you can take it with you'. The student chooses a sheep, but as he's about to leave with it the villager calls him back mockingly; 'Hey Mr Phd student, you know the problem with your research? Nobody invited you to come here, you've only told me what I already know, and you certainly don't understand the ground realities of life around here because that's not a sheep, that's my dog' (Field notes 16th September 2007)

The story got a good laugh from the audience in the car, the point was made and there was little I could do to argue it. What could I say? Some dry comment to the effect that I had little interest in counting sheep and wasn't concerned with trying to abstract my findings as technical tables or charts? Perhaps I should have explained that the ground realities that I was interested in were actually those of activists and their everyday work. That my intention was not to evaluate according to predetermined criteria whether the work that activists carry out actually "worked" or could be improved upon, but, (*pace* David Mosse (2004, 646)), rather to understand *how* the work of transparency and accountability activism was being done, by whom and for what purpose.

While keeping in mind that ethnographic accounts are partial (Clifford 1986) I am confident that the ground realities and boundary paradoxes of activism that I have described in my thesis chapters would be familiar to transparency and accountability activists working in Delhi. In the opportunities that I have had to discuss my work with my informants it is clear that they are. Although as activists, engaged in problematising particular issues and seeking positive solutions, they are sometimes bemused by an ethnographic approach that focuses, for instance, on the rhetorical and narrative elements of activism.

Returning to my Research Questions.

In this conclusion I will summarise some of the ground realities and boundary paradoxes of transparency and accountability activism by returning to the thematic research questions that I set out in the introduction, and relating them to the events

covered in the chapters. The boundaries between these themes are extremely blurred and it is not easy to separate them out from each other, however I will address each question in turn. The first is:

How do transparency and accountability activists encounter, and negotiate, boundaries and connections in the course of their work?

I have argued that the everyday work of transparency and accountability activism is focused on delineating boundaries between state and society, public and private roles, and promoting mechanisms to facilitate active citizenship that will discipline those boundaries. But, as my thesis shows, to get their work done activists must themselves utilise personal connections and negotiate the blurred boundaries between state and society. I approached this topic in detail in chapter 5 where I offered accounts of the events leading to the passing of the Right to Information Act of 2005, the Drive Against Bribes campaign of 2006, and mediation work by members of a grassroots *sangathan* in a government office.

As I showed, in 2004 the personal networks of leading figures in the Right to Information scene were activated by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) election win. Access at the highest levels in government played a significant role in keeping the Right to Information on the policy agenda, and in the eventual drafting of the Act (Baviskar 2010, 145). Activists are quite open about how important access to people in power was in this process. Thus the blurred boundaries and personal connections of the everyday state and society are not only a factor in social exclusion and the denial of citizen's rights, but, paradoxically, also determine who gets to participate in the formulation of policies and laws directed at disciplining those boundaries. We also encountered this sense of connection being necessary for activist strategies in chapter 4, when an activist talks about contacts in the Home Ministry who might help him register an NGO without having to pay a bribe, and in chapter 7 when an activist says that his anti-corruption NGO has 'no money, we only have our influence'.

If transparency and accountability activists are willing to cross a notional boundary between state and society, and use personal influence and connections to achieve their ends, then they do this because it is morally acceptable to them, as being for a good cause. As Ruud notes in his work on everyday corruption and the public-private divide in India (see the section on boundaries and connections in chapter 1), the reason for crossing the boundary, and the manner in which it is done, are both related to whether the act is seen as legitimate or not by differently positioned actors in particular situations (2000a, 283). Even though they are focused on, and acutely aware of, social and ethical boundaries, in everyday practice activists treat the notional boundaries between state and society as flexible or permeable, and like many others in Indian society, appreciate the skilful performance of a well managed crossing.

In the Drive Against Bribes campaign and the *sangathan* activists' visit to the Food Supply Office (FSO) we saw the mediating role that activists must take to facilitate access to mechanisms for active citizenship. The everyday work of dealing with bureaucratic problems brings activists, and those seeking to use pro forma Right to Information applications designed by activists, into contact with the everyday practices of government. In the visit to the FSO with Kamla, Savitri and Anand we saw how practical knowledge (*jaankaari*) about the procedures of the FSO is required. Anand and Savitri help Kamla to negotiate her encounter with the local state, but Kamla is unable to take a meaningful part in the negotiation process. The *sangathan* workers are honest *dalaals* (brokers) but, in using their help, Kamla's potential to engage directly with the state as an active citizen is not realised. In Faisal's case from the Drive Against Bribes campaign his Right to Information application has the desired effect of removing a bureaucratic block, but only after he follows it up in person and negotiates an outcome with the officials at the passport office. In neither Faisal's nor Kamla's case is the information requested received, and although both cases have successful outcomes, in both cases the blurred boundary between the everyday state and society endures in the mediated and negotiated nature of the bureaucratic encounter. Paradoxically, rather than producing a disciplined state watched over by active citizens,

one of the ground realities of transparency and accountability activism in India is that it works *through* the everyday practices of government even as it challenges them.

The theme of mediation was picked up again in chapter 6 as I introduced the *sangathan* that Anand and Savitri work for in more detail. We saw how people come to the *sangathan* meetings seeking help with accessing their rights via the state and connections to *bare log* (big people) who may be able to help them find employment. The *sangathan* does promote active citizenship and empowerment, but it might also be understood, using ‘quotidian forms of political common sense’ (Hansen 1999, 137), as an alternative route for people seeking mediation with the local state which does not involve paying a *dalaal*. The theme of connections also re-emerged as we saw how Anand maintains a variety of links to different local actors. He breaks his older ideological links to local organisations from the Hindu political right but maintains social links with them even as he builds his links to the Right to Information ‘movement’. As he points out, even as an active and knowledgeable citizen, it is essential to have contacts to move ahead, and he has worked since he was a teenager to build up his current network.

In Chapter 7, at the public audit held at *Soochna Khabar*, connections and boundaries play a different role. We saw how Rita has to decide whether to cross the boundary between what is revealed and what remains hidden. In the end although she is concerned about the audit, she is not willing to make her concerns public in case the image of the ‘movement’ is damaged. The problem here, for Rita and me as the only outsiders attending the audit, is one of *soochna* (information as data). The accounts are presented in an opaque format, as bundles of receipts paired with an official document from the accountant signing them off. Those attending the audit know this official presentation conceals a secondary narrative, the gossip about the NGO within the Right to Information ‘movement’. In the end only the official presentation of the accounts can be publicly acknowledged as the gossip does not qualify as data. The social connections and loyalties between activists help to keep these potentially negative narratives about the activist scene hidden. Thus people within the activist scene are aware that

transparency has limits. The same boundaries that exist between transparency and opacity, as personal qualities in everyday life, regulate what may or may not be made public in the practice of transparency and accountability activists. In this respect activists are probably no more transparent or accountable than any other group in society.

The second question is: *What roles do factors related to class, gender, social and cultural capital and the spatialised hierarchies of Delhi, play in the everyday life and organisation of transparency and accountability activism?*

These themes have featured consistently throughout the thesis. The relationships between classes, genders and spaces in the city play a significant role in the way that activism is organised. Chapter 2 set up this theme with its discussion of the city and the relationship between space and class. Projects to promote transparency, accountability and active citizenship have to work through these spaces and relationships. In Chapter 4, through its focus on two popular films about citizenship and activism, I introduced the connection between media representations of activism and the enrolment of middle class youth in activist campaigns such as the Drive Against Bribes (chapter 5) and youth organisations such as *Yuva Kriya* (chapter 7).

In chapters 5 and 6 I introduced how the social and cultural capital and class position of particular activists allows them to access different spaces in the city with differing amounts of ease, and determines their capabilities and participation as workers at the grassroots or policy levels of the scene. Some have access to the highest levels of government and the offices of funding organisations, and others to slum areas, both spaces in the city that are not easily penetrated by those unfamiliar with the physical and social terrain.

In chapter 6 we saw how the day to day operation of the south Delhi *sangathan* is structured by the social and physical boundaries of the city. Some of these boundaries are crossed in the process of the *sangathan*'s work. In the case of Padma, claiming her

family's right to a reserved place in education and getting her sons into the upper middle class school behind the wall of her house, we saw an exclusive social boundary being challenged and crossed. In the everyday grassroots work of upper middle class activists like Anita, boundaries are crossed as she moves around the city, often with Anand, entering spaces not ordinarily seen as appropriate for someone of her age, class and gender.

Yet, despite the crossing of boundaries and the performance of equality at activist meetings, the *sangathan* is also a site through which the social distances and boundaries present in the city are reproduced. To account for the divisions of the city, and allow access by a range of clients, the *sangathan* offices have to be sited in neutral spaces that can be accessed by people of all classes, as is the case with the *Parivartan* office in the north east of the city. "Grassroots" work in the slums or in middle class areas must be carried out by particular people, of the appropriate gender, and with the capacity and local connections necessary to do the work. The social division of the city means that the upper middle class 'core group' that originally conceived the *sangathan* had to find gatekeepers in slum areas, such as Anand in Durga Camp, in order to make the work of the *sangathan* possible. Gendered distinctions are also reproduced through the practice of the group. The community mobilisation for the *sangathan* is mostly done by women using local friendship networks, and some women attend regularly. Thus, although the *sangathan* is not a group specifically for women, the weekly meeting has become to a great extent a space defined by gender.

Similarly the 'policy work' of the *sangathan*, the maintenance of connections to networks in national level activism, development, funding and the media, requires the involvement of those who have the appropriate skills with language and technology, the social and cultural capital, to work at that level. It is the ability of the upper middle class 'core group' to 'operate' (Harriss 2005b, 32) in this way which makes the *sangathan* visible as part of the Delhi's middle class 'civil society' scene.

As Gandhi and Shah observe in the organisation of activist collectives in India working in the field of women's empowerment, although the collectives have rejected hierarchies, 'subtle hierarchies' are reproduced through the division of labour within groups (1999, 316-317). I would argue that in groups such as the *sangathan*, who are part of what Jenkins calls the 'second wave' of anti-corruption activism, and operate as coalitions between classes, (Jenkins 2007, 62-63) the hierarchies are far more obvious than subtle.

In chapter 7 I widened the focus of my examination of social reproduction in the activist scene by examining how class and gender play out in public performances of authenticity. Part of the work of activism involves the public presentation of narratives about activist successes and struggles to different audiences. Depending on the audience and the space in which the presentation is being made the appropriate activist, identified by class position, will be used. In the case of Savitri's speech at the South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR) conference we saw how the *sangathan* chooses a female community mobiliser from Durga Camp as its representative. Her physical presence and voice, almost as much as the content of her speech about the successes that the *sangathan* has had, provide evidence to social activists, state and media representatives from the upper middle class and elite of Delhi society. These are *bare log* (big people) as the *sangathan* activists from Durga Camp put it, and they need to be shown that empowerment *is* taking place at the grassroots. Savitri is speaking across a social boundary within the activist scene, invited into a conference space to 'speak truth to power' as an authentic grassroots worker. I argued that her performance, and others like it at conferences that I attended, helps the activist scene to momentarily glimpse itself as a whole, as the policy and grassroots levels are brought together in the conference space. But, rather than the boundary between classes being transcended, it is in fact reproduced in the performance itself.

In Chapter 8 we saw how middle class activists are able to access funding opportunities and patronage networks and are fairly mobile within the scene. Even though the sums that they receive as fellowships are small compared to professional salaries for people

with their educational qualifications, they are able to seek out opportunities within the scene in a way that less mobile, working class activists are not. As the case of Sanjay and Anya showed, the social and cultural capital that middle class activists enjoy gives them agency, and opportunities to take an entrepreneurial approach to their work. As we saw in the case of Anita (in chapter 6) engagement with activism can also give middle and upper middle class activists valuable additions to their curriculum vitae. Working class activists, such as Anand (see chapter 6) have less agency and mobility. Even though he achieves recognition in Durga Camp and is made *pradhan*, this is an informal position and means that he must cut ties to the middle class ‘civil society’ scene and the opportunities that he thinks it offers. Although connection to the activist scene can offer empowerment and agency to working class activists, it is unsurprising that middle class activists are able to capitalise on their work to a much greater extent.

As I outlined in chapter 2 the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1985, 1986) provides a useful framework with which to think about these kinds of social reproduction. As Jeffrey et al highlight in their analysis of education and the reproduction of difference in rural Uttar Pradesh, applying Bourdieu’s focus on everyday social practice reveals how ‘the power of dominant classes is exercised, transformed, and resisted in north India’ (2005, 2088), while allowing for the possibility of social change. Just as Jeffery et al note for education, transparency and accountability activism offers opportunities for some to change their circumstances. The development of *jaankaari* (practical knowledge) about the workings of the local state offers some agency, while connection to the middle class networks of the activist scene might allow some mobility. However, the spatialised hierarchies of the city, which structure the practices of activism, also help to keep activist workers from different classes in their place. Even as activists try to transcend boundaries of class and space in the city they reproduce them. Paradoxically, to achieve its successes, transparency and accountability activism must work with the grain of inequality in the city.

The third question is: *How do activists deploy rhetoric, narrative and performance to sustain support for their projects?*

An essential part of the work of activism involves the production and reproduction of narratives that communicate what it is that groups and individual activists do. These rhetorics of social change and citizenship frame strategies for citizen action by suggesting that, through the application of transparency and accountability mechanisms, the social justice promised by the constitution of India can be realised, and the nation renewed.

The need to disseminate narratives about activist work requires that activist groups foster contacts and partnerships with the media. As I have outlined above, relationships such as these are negotiated by activists working at the middle class, Anglophone, policy level in the scene. The nationwide Drive Against Bribes campaign, discussed in chapter 5, was the most successful example of this phenomenon during my field work. Tie ups with leading ‘media houses’ during the campaign allowed the nation-wide dissemination of ‘success stories’ about citizens using the Right to Information Act 2005 to address grievances with government bureaucracies. In particular, securing the support of the NDTV news channel (an organisation first introduced in my discussion of sting operations and the film *Rang de Basanti* in chapter 4), as a conduit for activist rhetoric about the potential of the Right to Information to secure social justice, was a major coup for the campaign organisers.

I picked up the theme of rhetoric, narrative and performance in detail in chapter 7 through a discussion of the use of ‘success stories’ by activists, and of how presentations of activist work are tailored to different spaces and media. I do not treat rhetoric as empty words that can somehow be compared to an objective reality and found wanting. Rather, I understand rhetoric as persuasive speech or action that can provide an insight into activist identities and networks. By focusing on the intention of the rhetor, the audience and the situation we gain an opportunity to observe the skilled performance of group culture and membership (Carrithers 2005, 582).

Rhetoric is interactive. The stories that activists tell in the course of their work help to persuade others that the work is effective, but also play a role in helping activists to

persuade themselves that their work is worth continuing. Stories can be very personal, describing moments of great pride or struggle in activist's lives, providing a sense of belonging to groups, and encouraging esprit de corps. Stories involving particular activists and events belong to particular groups, and in their telling and reproduction through different media, take on the role of folklore within activist groups and the wider scene. As I showed with Nannu's story, and the MKSS story about the Janawad scam, some narratives can take on a life of their own, spreading through the internet and finding their way into policy documents and Power-Point presentations about governance and active citizenship on the websites of development agencies such as the UN.

As we saw with Savitri's speech at the SAHR conference, the performance of activist narratives may help to draw support and resources into the scene, and hold the scene together across the social and physical distances that it encompasses. Cases from the grassroots are presented and performed in different formats and forums in order that media exposure and funding might be secured. In Arvind Kejriwal's filmed presentations to potential donors in the US, rhetorical narratives about activism and the effectiveness of activist strategies are essential to securing financial support. As with Savitri's performance at the conference in Delhi the voice and person of the rhetor is crucial to the audience and situation. In an international setting the fact that Arvind is *khas* (special), an articulate and award winning activist, a star turn, ensures that fellowships will be provided to support activists at the grassroots in India.

We also saw in chapter 7 how a complicated rhetorical performance can be deployed to settle a contested issue. My use of the term *tamaasha* (a show or spectacle) to describe the public audit at *Soochna Khabar* is chosen to reflect that, although the event can be read as a straightforward attempt to provide a public space in which the accounts can be viewed, it is also a performance. In fact, as the accounts could not be easily interpreted the event became more a performance than anything else.

In a broader methodological context considering rhetoric and performance prompts reflection on the research process. Activist accounts of events may become authorised versions through repetition, writing and reproduction, particularly when activists are public figures, much interviewed, and authors in their own right. For example, narratives of the genesis of the Right to Information ‘movement’ in India tend to follow a pattern not just because they are descriptions of events, but also because the same leading figures are repeatedly interviewed by interested researchers (note the similarities between my own interview data and telling of the Right to Information story and those of Baviskar (2010) and Kirmani (2007) cited in chapter 5). Authors who are part of activist social networks also reproduce versions of these narratives in the news media and the academic press (Mander and Joshi 1999; Mander 2003; Roy and Dey 2001b; Dey and Sampat 2005).

Their repetition does not make these narratives less interesting. However taken for granted the reproduction of the MKSS/NCPRI centred history of the Right to Information in north India has become, it is important because it is a historical narrative referenced by a significant number of north Indian activists, and frames the work on social accountability of *sangathans* in Delhi¹²⁶. Taking rhetoric, narrative and performance into account allows us to consider where these stories come from and how they spread, without dismissing them as fictions.

A focus on rhetoric, narrative and performance as ground realities of transparency and accountability activism throws up yet another boundary paradox. Because of the fundamental concern that they have with presenting their work to different media representatives and audiences, amongst whom I include anthropologists, transparency and accountability activists may sometimes adopt what Cowan calls ‘informant postures’ (1990, 96). That is, framing, reproducing and disseminating the narratives that they think will be most persuasive. In doing so they once again negotiate a flexible

¹²⁶ It would be interesting to hear other versions that contest this smooth representation. Hints of dissent do emerge on internet forums from activists in other parts of India, in Maharashtra for example, and perhaps scholars will uncover other histories, but, it has not been within the scope of this thesis to attempt this. I hope that a forthcoming thesis about the Right to Information movement by Suchi Pande, of the Institute of Development studies, will go some way towards it.

boundary between transparency and opacity, between what is revealed and what remains hidden.

My attention to rhetoric, narrative, performance and the role of new media offers a fresh insight to the study of the transparency and accountability activist scene in India. While these themes have featured widely in accounts of activism in the US and Europe (Gitlin 2003; Gamson 1995; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; Keck and Sikkink 1998, chapter 1), they are often lacking from accounts of activism in south Asia. A recent special issue of *Contemporary South Asia* begins to address this gap in the literature (Evans 2010; Gorringer 2010; Webb 2010). However, the potential remains for further work, particularly considering the enormous amount of activist content now available through new media and web 2.0 sites such as YouTube.

The fourth question is: *how do activists negotiate intra-scene power relationships and networks of support in order to sustain a full time engagement with activism?*

In academic literature that deals with transparency and accountability activism in India there has been a notable lack of interest in how activists sustain their engagement with the activism scene, and thus how activist groups continue to operate. Scholars might briefly mention that activist *sangathans* or ‘people’s movements’ do not accept institutional funding, particularly from foreign sources, but then confine themselves to discussions of collective action and social accountability (Goetz and Jenkins 2001, 374; Mentschel 2005, 62; Pande 2008, 53; Baviskar 2010, 132). Rob Jenkins and Anne-Marie Goetz make illuminating, but brief, references to connections and resources flows between movement organisations and established NGOs in the transparency and accountability scene (Jenkins 2004, 226, Jenkins 2007, 64-65; Goetz and Jenkins 2005, 106). But, as far as I am aware, my thesis offers the first attempt to engage in any detail with how transparency and accountability activists manage their livelihoods. This is not an attempt to expose *hera-pheri* (dodgy dealings) within the activist scene, and I do not seek to add fuel to the already overheated conspiracy theories of authors such as Rajan and Kak (2006). Rather it is an attempt to address an obvious ground reality for

activism and activists; how to manage a full time engagement with activism and sustain a livelihood.

This theme runs through some of my discussion about the role of class and social and cultural capital in transparency and accountability activism. In chapter 6 the case studies of different members of the grassroots *sangathan* showed how commitment to being an activist also brings remuneration. For the *sangathan* workers from Durga Camp, these comparatively small amounts of money may comprise a significant part of their livelihood. As we saw in Anand's case the potential loss of the salary that the *sangathan* pays him plays a role in his decision to return to the group, after having left to become *pradhan* of Durga Camp. In chapter 7 gossip about funding and commitment, and concerns that activism is being treated as a 'business', prompts the public audit at *Soochna Khabar*. But it is in chapter 8 that I addressed the issue of livelihoods and funding in detail.

Here I argue that the transparency and accountability activist scene is organised around principles of commitment, selfless service and informality, and that these principles structure power relationships within the scene. Some activists, often older and from the upper middle classes, have incomes independent of the activist scene, from pensions, professional careers or consultancy work. But for many younger or poorer activists these options are not available and careers or other sources of income must be found if they are to sustain their activism.

To keep the brightest activists involved at the grassroots level donor organisations provide fellowships. To gain a fellowship activists must obtain a nomination from a leading figure in the scene. These are usually *sangathan* leaders or well known senior activists trusted by the donor organisation, and essentially act as patrons. In the stories of Sanjay, Anya and Sahila we saw how young middle class activists with good reputations, qualifications and connections can move between patrons within the activist scene who are able to organise funding. Even though Sanjay and Anya are trying to develop their own space within the scene, and at first avoid taking funding for

Yuva Kriya, in the end it is a nomination from a local activist leader for two fellowships from a US based donor that gives them their independence. For Sahila her switch in patrons takes her to a different network within the scene, to another fellowship provided by a US donor, and to coordinating work on the national level. Thus for those who are able to find and retain the support of patrons, mobility and even advancement within the scene is possible. For working class or less qualified activists this type of mobility is not available. The informal organisation of the scene, and the need for reliable grassroots workers, makes it hard for them to change roles and means that they are tied to particular patrons or *sangathan* leaders. If, as in the case of Lalit at the south Delhi *sangathan*, they do not perform satisfactorily, they may find themselves quickly demoted to volunteer.

Thus my focus on activist livelihoods shows that there are potential winners and losers within this informally organised social world. The use of positive discourses of grassroots informality, commitment and collective action to talk about activism exclude recognition of the inequalities between activists, and perhaps also prevent many scholars from focusing on the issue. It seems odd that a scene devoted to promoting strategies directed at ensuring that bureaucracy works for people ethically and fairly should itself be organised along such non-rational and personalised lines.

Paradoxically, the everyday social world of transparency and accountability activism, like the everyday state and society that it seeks to discipline, is a site which resists a disciplining gaze, where patronage plays an important role and where, as a result, social difference is reproduced.

Addressing Wider Themes that Emerge from the Thesis

Having reviewed how my thesis addresses my research questions in this section I will broaden my discussion to encompass two themes which demonstrate the wider significance and contribution of my thesis. The first concerns the study of activism and social movements and the second concerns connection and patronage.

As I explained in Chapter 3 I have not identified my activist informants as being part of a social movement, except where they do so themselves, because of the significance and political baggage of the term in contemporary India (Omvedt 1993, 190-191; Kamat 2002, 19; Baviskar 2010, 134; Kothari 1990, 2:402; Sheth 2004, 5). Some transparency and accountability activists would argue that they are part of a grassroots movement (*andolan*), some scholars would rather argue that they are members of ‘campaigning and lobbying groups usually centred around particular NGOs’ (Harriss 2006, 463). Neither is incorrect, in fact the tensions and intersections between these different constructions of political engagement are productive and lie behind the distinction I have set out between the ‘policy’ and ‘grassroots’ levels of the activist scene (see chapter 6). I have focused on the idea of a transparency and accountability activism ‘scene’, as it is a term which I feel better encompasses the heterogeneous nature of the groups and individuals that meet each other on the terrain of anti-corruption activism (see chapter 3). However, this said, I should not ignore the potential contribution that my thesis makes to the literature on social movements and activism, particularly in light of what my ethnography reveals about the everyday practices of activism in Delhi.

My first point concerns the specific character of transparency and accountability activism itself. Politically, we might think about transparency and accountability as a meta issue. That is that campaigns for increased transparency and accountability might be organised by groups of any political colour and from any group in society with the means to mobilise a campaign. Legal powers to access information can, in theory, be used as a tool by qualified individuals to any political end not just against the state itself but also against other individuals about whom the state holds information. In these terms the only identity which is relevant in using this tool is that of the liberal citizen, however illiberal the use to which information gained through the Right to Information is put.

Transparency and accountability legislation becomes part of the repertoire of protest (Tilly 2008, 191) available to Indian citizens in struggles involving the state. Thus transparency and accountability activism itself is not based in specific identities beyond those of the nation and the citizen. It relates to the sublime myth of the state as a symbol of national secular modernity and guarantor of social order and justice (Hansen 2001,

126, 2000, 32). In this respect the field of activism related to securing legislation for transparency and accountability does not fit easily with social movement theories concerning political action organised around class interests, or the identity based activism understood to characterise ‘New Social Movements’ (Edelman 2001; Gledhill 2000, 185; Omvedt 1993; Foweraker 1995). Even though activists may have specific political agendas based around class, caste or other identities to which their involvement in transparency and accountability activism speaks.

Thus, by engaging with transparency and accountability activism my thesis contributes to a broader literature on activism and social movements by revealing an activist field that is not a site of radical societal challenge and change, nor a movement directed at autonomy (Nash 2005, 22; Alvarez and Escobar 1992, 322; Roniger 1998, 68), but actually a site through which the hegemony of the state is reproduced by actors with disparate interests. As Kamat points out in her work on grassroots development NGOs in India, when the idea of the state operates as an implicit construct in struggles that are intimately connected to the state, and thus organisational pedagogy produces the state as ideologically and discursively ideal, then activism plays a role in the reproduction of capitalist relations and the modern bourgeois state (2002, 134).

Next, my work answers a call set out by some scholars of social movements to pay more attention to the lived experiences and protest repertoires of activists (Edelman 2001, 309), and to avoid transforming activist groups into;

‘unitary actors devoid of internal contradictions and contradictory tendencies and isolating them from larger social, cultural and political fields in which they experience their ebbs and flows’(Gledhill 2000, 196).

An ethnographic focus on the everyday practice of activist groups provides an essential perspective on micro-power relations within groups, and the way that groups mobilise. These micro level practices may be skimmed over as authors attempt to assess the success, and implications for policy, of initiatives that foster citizen action (Houtzager, Joshi, and Gurza Lavalle 2008; Gaventa and McGee 2010b) or align themselves with the aims of activists. For example, some commentators on contemporary ‘grassroots’

activism in India do not sufficiently address the social distinctions between group members, or perhaps make only passing references to the social position of activists and the effect that this has on the practice and outcomes of their activism (Reddy 2005; Sheth 2004). This is also true of otherwise excellent work on transparency and accountability activism in India, and Delhi in particular (Goetz and Jenkins 2005; Jenkins 2007; Pande 2008; Baviskar 2010; Corbridge et al. 2005, 219-224). I would argue that ethnographic accounts of the everyday practices of power within activism can make a significant contribution to our understanding of these kinds of mobilisation; an understanding that might usefully inform academic and policy discussions about collective action, governance and mobilisations for change.

Writing from within political geography, the politically engaged work of Routledge (2003) on the anti dam movement activism of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) in India, and Routledge et al (2007) on activists working within the People's Global Action (PGA) – Asia network, does address power differentials between activists to some extent. In his work on the NBA Routledge talks about the 'highly educated and professionally qualified leadership' of the NBA who are concerned with organising liaisons with international networks, carrying out research and lobbying government (2003, 255). He also notes, in a discussion of academic engagement with activism, how places and spaces are constructed and experienced as material artefacts and networks of social relations and how this 'informs us of the ambiguous character of social movements, where practices of domination are invariably entangled with those of resistance' (2003, 266). However this theme is not developed through a detailed case study and thus does not develop the argument further.

Distinctions between activists also emerge in some accounts of transnational activism. Routledge et al (2007) discuss how some activists within PGA - Asia, who they call 'imagineers', are highly mobile internationally, have access to the latest mobile technology through which a great deal of network traffic is routed, and as a result have taken on the role of an informal elite within the network (2007, 2584). A similar networking role for particular activists is also suggested in the work of Marianne

Maecklebergh (2009) and Jeffrey Juris (2008) on organisational networks within the alter-globalisation movement. These ethnographers, writing from the perspective of 'politically engaged' or 'militant' anthropology' (Scheper-Hughes 1995; Hale 2006), focus on decision making in transnational and deterritorialised networks. They are intimately concerned with power relationships within networks and attempts to transform democratic values (Maeckelbergh 2009, 160) and reveal a great deal about how people attempt to work towards change through activism. However, as with the work of Routledge and others cited above they reveal little of how the practice of activism itself might actually reproduce the underlying distinctions and social processes of the world that it is attempting to effect change in, and what role social and cultural capital might play in the activist networks that they describe.

In contrast my thesis reveals some of the relationships between activism and political engagement, social position, social mobility and aspiration. It shows how activists might use connections to particular groups and patrons to leverage social mobility and how, within the social context in which the activism happens, hierarchical distinctions between levels such as policy and grassroots, and the political discourses about participatory democracy and equality to which activists attach themselves, actually fix people socially within the activist network (in particular see chapters 6 and 8). This is not intended as a return to social movement theories about resource mobilisation and methodological individualism in which people make cost benefit calculations, divorced from social context, about their involvement in a group (Foweraker 1995, 17). Instead my work sets out the way that social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 243-252) plays a fundamental role in the everyday practice of activism, assigning roles for particular individuals according to capacities developed through class habitus and distinction (Bourdieu 1984, 101).

Thus I would argue that while activists may be conscious of power relations within groups, believe in the necessity of reordering power in society, and may even develop what Crossley (2003) calls a 'radical habitus', that is developing a disposition to continued political activism through the practice and experience of it (2003, 50), they

are less concerned about the inequalities inherent in the dispositions and educational advantages which make people useful in different ways to activist projects. As Baiocchi points out in his work on participatory governance initiatives in Porto Alegre, Brazil, referencing Bourdieu's work on language and symbolic power (1991);

‘utterances between speakers are always expressions of *relations of power between them*. The competence to speak embodies difference and inequality. A privileged class habitus imparts the technical ability to speak *and* the standing to make certain statements.’ (Baiocchi 2003, 53)

This is certainly the case where transparency and accountability activists in India engage with each other, with wider activist networks, and with the state in attempts to improve governance.

These arguments might also lead us to revisit some of the ways in which social movement theory thinks about prefigurative action (Gamson 1992, 62-63; Maeckelbergh 2011; Heller 2001). The task of prefiguration is to; ‘create and sustain within the lived practice of the movement relationships and political forms that prefigured or embodied the desired society’ (Breines in Gamson 1992, 62). While decision making processes amongst my activist informants in Delhi are not as self-consciously worked through as those which Maeckelbergh describes in her work on prefiguration in the alter-globalisation movement (Maeckelbergh 2011, Maeckelbergh 2009, 66), part of the everyday practice of transparency and accountability activism in Delhi *is* directed towards prefigurative action. We can see this in my descriptions of the performance of equality at meetings and conferences, the provision of space in activist discourse and rhetoric for subaltern voices, and the use of particular forms of honorific address to signify equality between group members (see chapters 6 and 7). However, these prefigurative actions emerge as rhetorical performances that mask to some extent the relations of inequality within groups. This does not empty them of meaning, but I would argue again that the way activism is actually played out through everyday practices does not prefigure a new society but rather reproduces existing structures and power relations. I would add to this that when transparency and accountability activism

produces a discourse of equality and empowerment which imagines a society in which all citizens have the same rights vis a vis the state, it implicitly references a wider middle class discourse of merit and achievement in which the historical and structural inequalities present in contemporary liberalised Indian society are not sufficiently acknowledged (Fernandes and Heller 2006, 513). Perhaps this might caution us not to take prefigurative action at face value, particularly when we support the aims of the groups in question

A discussion of power and inequality leads me to my next task which is to relate my thesis to literature on patronage and social connection. If transparency and accountability activism in Delhi appeals to, and attempts to foster, a sublime rational ideal of the state (Hansen 2001, 126, 2000, 32) which can guarantee citizens their rights, then my ethnography shows that activist networks often have to engage with what Hansen would call the 'profane' business of everyday government (2000, 35) in order to achieve their aims. As the history of the campaign for the Right to Information set out in Chapter 5 shows, personal connections and the ability to lobby to the highest levels of government by activists with the right connections were pre-requisites to the success of the campaign. Lower down in the network the election of Anand as a *Pradhan* in Durga camp (chapter 6) shows that the work of the *Sangathan*, which is aimed at empowerment, does not obviate the desire from its *jugghi* dwelling supporters for a well connected patron/broker/translator (Mosse and Lewis 2006, 16) who can work with the local state and connect them to the upper middle class core group of the *Sangathan*. This returns us to the detailed discussion of literature in chapter 1 which highlights the embedded nature of the everyday state in Indian society (Fuller and Benei 2000; Gupta 1995; Ruud 2000a; Tarlo 2000a; Corbridge et al. 2005; Veron et al. 2003). My ethnography shows that, like the everyday state which transparency and accountability activism attempts to discipline, civil society activism itself is just as inextricably embedded in society and a web of interpersonal connections, and no better able to maintain boundaries between idealised public and private spheres than the state that it criticises.

This issue of boundary maintenance between public and private is brought to the fore in chapter 8 and the discussion of the role of informality in the organisation of the activist scene and of activists' livelihoods. This is an area in which I hope to conduct further research in order to trace the transnational networks of activism and financial support systems which help to sustain activist livelihoods in Delhi. However, here I will restrict myself to a discussion of these informal arrangements set against the background of literature dealing with patronage in India.

The organisation of the activist scene emerges as a product of an activist philosophy which privileges ideals of informality, commitment, participation and equality.

However the necessity for some activists to access fellowships to support their work reinforces the positions of leading figures who are able to provide recommendations to donor organisations. An individual's ability to move within the activist scene, or even to remain working as full time activist can depend on the negotiation of these relationships and the formation of attachment to leaders, who in turn maintain attachments to international funding streams by virtue of their social position, track records and 'star' quality.

Thus an asymmetrical relationship develops between donors, leaders and other activists that recalls a chain of patron-client relations. It fulfils the theoretical assumption that a patron has access to political, cultural or economic resources that a client needs, and the means by which the client gains access to these resources is through personal relationships rather than by appeals to formal bureaucratic systems (Mitchell 1996, 416; Boissevain 1966, 18). As I have pointed out before, that this relationship is taking place in a setting constructed around a politics of secular modernity and transparency presents us with a paradox. As Roniger argues; 'at the level of principles, the logic of civil society and democracy runs counter to the logic of patronage and clientalism' (1998, 72). Thus my task here is to explore the distinctions between the forms of patron-client relationship I have observed in transparency and accountability activism and those described by anthropologists working in other settings in India. Thinking about patronage speaks to a wider discussion of power and empowerment within the activist scene as it is these informal relationships which delineate who get to take part

in activism and on what terms. It also requires some care as patronage is a loaded term, particularly when applied to activists publicly concerned about issues to do with cronyism and corruption.

To return first to the work of Jan Breman on patronage and labour relations (Breman 1974, 1993). Breman provides us with a view of the relationships between landowners and labourers in rural Gujarat. He suggests that while there had always been exploitation of labourers by the landowning classes at least this had been mitigated in part by patron-client relationships based on traditional obligations between caste groups. Labourers had been tied by relationships of dependency, charity and service to particular patrons. However, in the transition to an industrialized and monetized economy, and in a legal climate in which labour relations based on bondage had become increasingly unacceptable, patron-client relationships had broken down to be replaced by casualised employer-employee relationships in which the subaltern labourers became even more vulnerable (1993, 17-18, 1976, 1906). It is true that my informants are seeking livelihoods within a liberalised economy. However, to suggest that Breman's description of systems of traditional systems of patronage, or the development of the practice of debt bondage and labour attachment that he outlines for the liberalisation era (Breman 1999; Harriss-White 2003, 24-25; De Neve 1999), illuminates an analysis of informality and patronage in the activist scene is perhaps to stretch an analogy too far. At the lower levels of the *Sangathans* which I describe the remuneration that grassroots *karyakarte* receive for their work does make a difference to their family incomes. As we saw in the case of Anand in Chapter 6 financial considerations influenced his decision to stay with the *Sangathan*. In this respect activists at the lower levels of the scene are in informal, and sometimes casualised, employment. But my activist informants are not tied to each other by anything as solid as land or industrial production. Rather my ethnography reveals that the issues that bring people to the activist scene are a mix of political engagement, aspirations for social mobility and a search for brokers who can help with bureaucratic encounters. Relations of economic dependency do not appear in a significant way in the activist context.

A more fruitful comparison with the activist context might be found in work by Mattison Mines (1994) and Geert de Neve (2005, 2000). They show how dominant individuals known as ‘Big Men’ employ patronage in their attempts to develop constituencies within urban communities in Tamil Nadu. Although the big men emerge from caste associations their patronage is directed at the wider community, particularly through giving to temples and the organisation of festivals. Through these relations of patronage the community becomes identified with its pre-eminent men and their kingly status (De Neve 2005, ch 8, De Neve 2000; Mines 1994, ch 3). In the activist context there is some of this focus on leadership present. Particularly in the way that certain leaders take on great personal significance in relation to funding schemes directed at promoting social entrepreneurship, and develop constituencies in this regard (see chapter 8), or are able to foster connections to politics, the state and media organisations (see chapter 5). But again the comparison will only be stretched so far. Mines and De Neve describe a system of patronage bound up with religious events and ritual cycles of renewal. The relationships taking place in the activist context are secular and reference a saintly politics of frugality and self-denial (Morris-Jones 1963, 140) rather than the distribution of largesse. Activist organisations are not rich, and activists are not likely to become rich through their work, although some may personally possess significant economic capital from sources outside of the activist scene itself. Even those who are able to access funds are provided with relatively small amounts and often with limits placed by donors on the ways in which they might be spent.

Thus my thesis makes a contribution by presenting a paradoxical form of patronage which is self-consciously modern, stripped of ritualistic and traditional trappings and even made visible through processes of oversight and documentation made publicly available through the internet. A patronage which is presented by both patrons and clients as transparent and accountable, yet which is still based on personal relationships and recommendations, on vertically organised power relationships validated by the social and cultural capital of charismatic leader figures within the specific context of the activist scene. Even in a field as self-conscious about the politics of connection as

the transparency and accountability activism scene, it seems that connections are fundamental to the strategies which activists employ.

This leads us to wonder if the focus on interpersonal connections that has emerged from the thesis is a specifically Indian, or South Asian, cultural phenomenon or whether it can be offered as a broader critique of grand sociological narratives about the spread of rationalisation, bureaucratisation and democratisation (Giddens 1971, 180; Morrison 1995, 293; Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002, 303) that lie behind normative conceptions of what constitutes good governance (Evans and Rauch 1999; Klitgaard 1998). In his still relevant 1963 essay W.H. Morris-Jones sets out three idioms operative in Indian politics, the modern, the traditional and the saintly. Developing his theme of the interaction of these idioms in public life he suggests that when we try to understand both the general and particular aspects of Indian political life we should consider; ‘the gap between profession and practice, the difference between the way things really get done and the way in which they are presented as being done’ (1963, 142). He goes on to argue that much of what we call corruption in India is ‘the work of men not long released from one set of firm social bonds, not yet submissive to a new set’ (1963, 143). But 40 years later, post the transition to liberalisation, the development of a new technology economy and with the growth of a new middle class, commentators are still making a similar argument about the working of democratic politics in India and the necessity for an evolutionary transition in the attitude of the Indian public to democracy (Gupta 2000, 159-160). The politics of connection revealed in this thesis show that even transparency and accountability activists who would self-consciously act as agents of rationalisation, bureaucratisation and democratisation, those who would clean up politics and make government accountable, are bound into the political and bureaucratic culture that has developed in India. There is little that they can do to escape this, they are entwined into the mutually constitutive relationship between the state and civil society (Chandoke 2003, 260).

That said, I do not think that this type of engagement is peculiar to India, or even to south Asia. As Roniger points out writing about clientalism and civil society beyond south Asia;

‘The logic of modern constitutional democracy and the praxis and pragmatics of everyday life and social action, moral obligations and commitments are enmeshed and reformulated in recurrent patterns of action and exchange through webs of movements, communities, associations and relationships. Within them the hierarchical logic of patronage may be projected as a mechanism influencing and sometimes even conditioning the timing and mechanics, and variable outcomes of the current processes of democratization’ (Roniger 1998, 71)

In terms of transparency and accountability activism these webs of movements, practices, obligations and associations, like ideas of rationality and modernity, do not stop at national borders. They connect through transnational networks, diasporas and institutions and offer opportunities for comparative work from scholars interested in investigating the everyday practices and social life of the good governance industry through detailed ethnography¹²⁷. In this respect I hope that this thesis begins to make a contribution to this research project, as well as to the anthropology of South Asia.

Although I have taken a critical approach to transparency and accountability activism this should not be interpreted as negative criticism or a dismissal of activist work per se. I remain enormously impressed by the energy and commitment of the activists I met in Delhi. They do good work, and even if society does not change as quickly as activists might hope, then activism does make positive changes to people’s lives, most often those of activists themselves. Perhaps this offers a way for me to think about the success produced by my informants’ engagement with activism.

Success is getting your sons into a good school. Success is building your own space in the activist scene. Success is the negotiation of personal networks. Success is getting Kamla her ration entitlement. Success is holding a press conference to release a report. Success is your fellowship money coming through. Success is filing a large number of RTIs. Success is organising a *Jan Sunwai*. Success is gaining *jaankaari* and losing your

¹²⁷ Articles by ethnographers emerging from the panel ‘Empires of Governance: Disjunctures in the Global Anti-corruption Industry’ presented at the 2008 meeting of the American Anthropological association and currently under peer review at the journal *Development and Change* should begin to address this task.

fear of the police. Success is your *sangathan* leader winning the Magsaysay award or an Ashoka Fellowship. Success is presenting evidence of your successes to the public. Success is relative; how you view success depends on who you are and how you are positioned in the scene. If I were a transparency and accountability activist in Delhi then I would counter criticism by saying that it is early days, that activism it is an ongoing project, and that the researcher should come back in a few years and take another look. I would agree with this assessment. But, on my return, I would still follow David Mosse's exhortation to examine 'not whether but *how* development projects work; not whether a project succeeds, but how 'success' is produced' (2005, 8).

So, to return to the overarching question that I set out in the introduction: *If activism is directed at producing a future that conforms to activist's ideal constructions of how India should be, then how must activists work in the present to bring this future about?*

This thesis has shown how activism backed by legal mechanisms for transparency and accountability can achieve positive outcomes for individuals in specific cases.

However, the ability of people to participate in processes of social accountability and active citizenship is limited by a number of interlinking factors including social class, gender and literacy. This does not mean that we should write these accountability processes off, but neither should we succumb to boosterism from activists or governments about their efficacy. My focus on transparency and accountability activism as a social world shows that activist attempts to delineate boundaries between state and society, and police them through active citizenship, a supposed 'exit option' (Corbridge et al. 2005, 8) from the problem of a lack of governance, are riven with paradoxes. To get their work done activists have to work through the structures of society as they encounter it. Even as social change and agency are wrought through activism, so the enduring boundaries, inequalities and spatialised hierarchies of Indian society are reproduced.

References

- Abrams, Philip. 1988. Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State (1977). *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1: 58-89. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6443.1988.tb00004.x.
- Action Aid. 2008. Human Rights Based approaches to Poverty and Development. Action Aid. <http://www.actionaid.org/assets/pdf/RBA%20paper%20FINAL.pdf>.
- Alvarez, Sonia, and Arturo Escobar. 1992. Theoretical and Political Horizons of Change in Latin American Social Movements. In *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy and Democracy*, 317-330. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Anders, Gerhard. 2005. Good Governance as Technology: Towards an Ethnography of the Bretton Woods Institutions. In *The Aid Effect*, ed. David Mosse and David Lewis, 37-60. London □ ; Ann Arbor MI: Pluto Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun, and Carol A. Breckenridge. 1995. Public Modernity in India. In *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian world*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge, 1-23. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Appleby, Paul, H. 1953. *Public Administration in India: Report of a Survey*. New Delhi: Government of India.
- Apthorpe, Raymond. 1997. Writing Development Policy and Policy Analysis Plain or Clear: On Language, Genre and Power. In *Anthropology of Policy: Critical Perspectives on Governance and Power*, ed. Cris Shore and Susan Wright, 43-58. London: Routledge.
- ASHA University of Florida. 2007. *Arvind Kejriwal speaking at University of Florida ASHA chapter meeting on June 1st 2007*. <http://video.google.co.uk/videoplay?docid=1954671061562303585&ei=3UCfSPGIF YH-jQKw07zPDw&hl=en>.
- Ashoka Foundation. 2006. People and Solutions: Introducing Social Entrepreneurs and their Innovative Ideas. Ashoka Foundation.
- . 2007. Ashoka India: Bringing Social Entrepreneurship to India. Ashoka Foundation.
- Asian Development Bank. 2005. ADB Conducts Review of Implementation of Governance and Anticorruption Policies. <http://www.adb.org/Documents/News/INRM/inrm200503.asp>.
- Asian Development Bank - OECD. 2002. ADB-OECD Anti-Corruption Initiative for Asia-Pacific: Combating Corruption In the New Millennium: Action plan implementation projects 2002-2003: India. Asian Development bank - OECD. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/6/62/35305871.pdf>.
- Association for India's Development (AID). 2006. *Arvind Kejriwal speaking at AID Bay area chapter October 21st 2006*. <http://video.google.co.uk/videoplay?docid=-7581775889327863921&ei=oEGfSLDEApjiQKGrSHTDw&q=arvind+RTI+bay+AI D&hl=en>.
- Association for India's Development (AID) Tempe chapter. 2006. RTI Evangelist Arvind Kejriwal's note. *Association for India's Development - Tempe Chapter*. <http://aidtempe.blogspot.com/>.

- Bahn, Gautam. 2006. Sandeep Pandey. In *Vox: Critical Conversations*, ed. Vatsala Kaul and Shyama Halder, 97-107. New Delhi: Buffalo Books.
- Baiocchi, Gianpaolo. 2003. Participation, Activism, and Politics: The Porto Alegre Experiment. In *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, ed. Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, 45-76. The Real Utopias Project IV. London□ ; New York: Verso.
- Banerji, Rukmini. 2000. Poverty and Primary Schooling: Field Studies from Mumbai and Delhi. *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, no. 10 (March 4): 795-802.
- Barnabas, A. P. 1969. *Citizens' Grievances and Administration*. New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration.
- Barthes, Roland. 1977. *Image, music, text*. Trans. Stephen. Heath. London: Fontana Press.
- Batliwala, Srilatha, and Deepa Dhanraj. 2007. Gender Myths that Instrumentalize Women: A view from the Indian Front Line. In *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations and Challenges*, ed. Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison, and Ann Whitehead, 22-34. London; New York: Zed Books.
- Baviskar, Amita. 1995. *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley*. New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2003. Between Violence and Desire: space, power, and identity in the making of metropolitan Delhi. *International Social Science Journal* 55, no. 1: 89-98.
- . 2006. Is Knowledge Power? The Right to Information Campaign in India. In Paper Presented to the Workshop on Social Movements and National Policy, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK.
- . 2007. Cows, Cars and Rickshaws: Bourgeois Environmentalists and the Battle for Delhi's Streets. Paper Prepared for the Workshop on the Middle Classes in India at the Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi, 15th - 17th March.
- . 2010. Winning the Right to Information in India: Is Knowledge Power. In *Citizen Action and National Policy Reform*, ed. John Gaventa and Rosemary McGee. Claiming Citizenship. London□ ; New York: Zed Books.
- Baviskar, B.S. 2005. Non-Governmental Organisations and Civil Society in India. In *On Civil Society: Issues and Perspectives*, ed. N. Jayaram, 137-149. New Delhi□ ;Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage.
- Bayart, Jean-Francois. 1993. *The State in Africa□ : The Politics of the Belly*. London□ ;New York: Longman.
- Bayliss, Kate. 2006. Privatisation Theory and Practice: A Critical Analysis of Policy Evolution in the Development Context. In *The New Development Economics: After the Washington Consensus*, ed. Jomo K S and Ben Fine, 144-163. London□ ; New York: Zed Books.
- Berenschot, Ward. 2009. *Riot politica: communal violence and state-society in Gujarat, India. Doctoral Thesis*. Amsterdam: Universiteti van Amsterdam.
- Beteille, Andre. 1991. The Reproduction of Inequality: Occupation, Caste and Family. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 25, no. 1: 3-28. doi:The Reproduction of Inequality: Occupation, Caste and Family.
- . 1992. Caste and Family: In Representations of Indian Society. *Anthropology Today* 8, no. 1: 13-18.
- . 2005. *The Anti-Utopia: Essential Writings of Andre Beteille*. Ed. Dipankar Gupta. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

- . 2007. The Description and Analysis of Classes. In *Marxism and Class Analysis*, 283-307. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Bhushan, Prashant. 2004. The Revolving Door of the IMF/World Bank. *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 45: 4877-4880.
- Bierschenk, T, J-P Chaveau, and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, eds. 2000. *Courtiers en Developpement: Les Villages Africains en Quete de Projets*. Paris: Karthala.
- Bijulal, M.V. 2004. *City Slum and the Marginalised: Dalits and Muslims in Delhi Slums*. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute.
- Bilgrami, Akeel. 2006. Gandhi's Integrity: the Philosophy behind the Politics. In *Debating Gandhi: A Reader*, ed. A. Raghuramaraju, 248-266. New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Billig, Michael. 1995. Rhetorical Psychology, Ideological Thinking and Imagining Nationhood. In *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, 64-81. London: Univesity College London Press.
- Blundo, Giorgio, and Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan. 2006. *Everyday Corruption and the State: Citizens and Public Officials*. London; New York: Zed Books.
- Boissevain, Jeremy. 1966. Patronage in Sicily. *Man* 1, no. 1. New Series (March 1): 18-33. doi:10.2307/2795898.
- Bornstein, David. 2004. *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bornstein, Erica. 2006. No Return: A Brief Typology of Philanthropy and the Sacred in New Delhi. In *The Practice of Altruism: Caring and Religion in Global Perspective*, ed. Reuben L.F. Habito and Keishin Inaba, 165-179. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press.
- Bose, Ashish. 1969. Land Speculation in Urban Delhi. Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- . 1985. The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups. *Theory and Society* 14, no. 6: 723-744.
- . 1986. The Forms of Capital. In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson, 241-258. New York: Greenwood Press.
- . 1989. Social Space and Symbolic Power. *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1: 14-25.
- . 1990. *The logic of practice*. Cambridge, UK; Oxford, UK: Polity Press □ : B. Blackwell.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and John B. Thompson. 1991. *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.
- Bourgouin, France. 2007. *The Young, the Wealthy and the Restless: Trans-National Capitalist Elite Formation In Post Apartheid Johannesburg*. Lund Monographs in Social Anthropology 18. Lund: Lund University.
- Breman, Jan. 1974. *Patronage and Exploitation*. Berkeley Calif.: University of California Press.
- . 1976. A Dualistic Labour System? A Critique of the "Informal Sector" Concept: II: A Fragmented Labour Market. *Economic and Political Weekly* 11, no. 49 (December 4): 1905-1908.
- . 1993. *Beyond Patronage and Exploitation: Changing Agrarian Relations in South Gujarat*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- . 1999. The study of industrial labour in post-colonial India—The informal sector: A concluding review. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 33, no. 1-2 (February 1): 407 - 431. doi:10.1177/006996679903300117.
- Buchanan, James. 1980. Rent seeking and Profit seeking. In *Toward a Theory of the Rent Seeking Society*, ed. James Buchanan, Robert Tollinson, and Gordon Tullock. College Station: Texas A & M University.
- Buchanan, James, Robert Tollinson, and Gordon Tullock, eds. 1980. *Toward a Theory of the Rent-Seeking Society*. College Station: Texas A & M University.
- Calman, Leslie. 1992. *Toward empowerment: women and movement politics in India*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Carrithers, Michael. 2005. Why Anthropologists Should Study Rhetoric. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11, no. 1: 577-583.
- Castells, Manuel. 1996. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Vol. 1. The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers.
- de Certeau, Michel. 1999. Walking in the City. In *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During, 126-133. 1st ed. London: Routledge.
- Chakrabarti, Poulomi Dhar. 2008. Inclusion or Exclusion? Emerging Effects of Middle Class Citizen Participation on Delhi's Urban Poor. *IDS Bulletin* 38, no. 6: 96-104.
- Chakrabarty, Bidyut. 2007. *Reinventing Public Administration: the Indian Experience*. New Delhi: Orient Longman.
- Chambers, Robert. 1997. Editorial: Responsible Well-Being - A personal Agenda for Development. *World Development* 25, no. 11: 1743-1754.
- Chandoke, Neera. 2003. The "Civil" and the "Political" in Civil Society. In *Civil Society and Democracy: a Reader*, ed. Carolyn M. Elliott, 238-261. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Chatterjee, Partha. 1999. *The Nation and its Fragments: colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. The Partha Chatterjee Omnibus. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 2001. On Civil and Political Society in Post Colonial Democracies. In *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, 165-178. Cambridge UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2004. *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Chatterjee, Sushmita. 2007. Cartooning Democracy: The Images of R.K. Laxman. *Political Science and Politics*, no. 40: 303-306.
- Chaturvedi, J.C. 2006. *Police Administration and Investigation of Crime*. Gyan Books.
- Chaudhury, Nilova Roy. 2007. October 2nd is Global Non-Violence Day. *Hindustan Times*, June 15, New Delhi edition.
<http://www.hindustantimes.com/storypage/storypage.aspx?id=54580f5e-15a0-4aaf-baa3-8f403b5688fa&&Headline=October+2+is+Int%27l+Non-Violence+Day>.
- Chaudhury, Shoma. 2006. The Making of a Paper. In *The Best of Tehelka 2*, ed. Vatsala Kaul, 12-23. New Delhi: Buffalo Books.
- Clifford, James. 1986. Introduction: Partial Truths. In *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 1-26. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- . 1997. Spatial Practices: Fieldwork, Travel, and the Disciplining of Anthropology. In *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, ed. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, 185-222. University of California Press.
- Conklin, Beth A. 1997. Body paint, feathers, and vcrs: aesthetics and authenticity in Amazonian activism. *American Ethnologist* 24, no. 4: 711-737. doi:10.1525/ae.1997.24.4.711.
- Cooper, Robert. 1997. The Visibility of Social Systems. In *Ideas of Difference: Social Spaces and the Labour of Division*, ed. Kevin Hetherington and Rolland Munro, 32-41. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Corbridge, Stuart, and John Harriss. 2003. *Reinventing India: liberalization, Hindu nationalism, and popular democracy*. Oxford India paperbacks. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Corbridge, Stuart, and S. Kumar. 2002. Community, corruption, landscape: tales from the tree trade. *Political Geography* 21, no. 6 (August): 765-788. doi:10.1016/S0962-6298(02)00029-X.
- Corbridge, Stuart, Glyn Williams, Manoj Srivastava, and Rene Veron. 2005. *Seeing the State Governance and Governmentality in India*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Cornwall, Andrea. 2007. Buzzwords and Fuzzwords, Deconstructing Development Discourse. *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4-5: 471-484.
- Cornwall, Andrea, and Celestine Nyamu-Musembi. 2004. Putting the "Rights-Based Approach" to Development into Perspective. *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 8: 1415-1437.
- Cowan, Jane. 1990. *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Crossley, Nick. 2003. From Reproduction to Transformation: Social Movement Fields and the Radical Habitus. *Theory, Culture & Society* 20, no. 6 (December 1): 43 -68. doi:10.1177/0263276403206003.
- Das, S. K. 2001. *Public office, private interest: bureaucracy and corruption in India*. New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Das, Veena. 1995. *Critical events: an Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. Delhi □ ;New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dasgupta, Priyanka. 2006. Nobody is Born Evil. *Times of India*, October 24, New Delhi edition. <http://www.articlearchives.com/crime-law/criminal-offenses-conspiracy/1775897-1.html>.
- Datta, V. N. 1986. Punjabi refugees and the Urban Development of Greater Delhi. In *Delhi Through the Ages: Selected Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society*, ed. Robert E. Frykenberg, 287-305. Oxford; New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- De Neve, Geert. 1999. Asking for and giving baki: Neo-bondage, or the interplay of bondage and resistance in the Tamilnadu power-loom industry. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 33, no. 1-2 (February 1): 379 -406. doi:10.1177/006996679903300116.
- . 2000. Patronage and "Community": The Role of a Tamil "Village" Festival in the Integration of a Town. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6, no. 3: 501-519.
- . 2005. *The Everyday Politics of Labour: Working Lives in India's Informal Economy*. Delhi: Social Science Press.

- Dean, Mitchell. 1999. *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*. London: Sage Publications.
- Delhi Development Authority. 2006. *Master Plan for Delhi, 1962*. New Delhi: Akalank Publications.
- Deshpande, Satish. 2003. *Contemporary India: a Sociological View*. New Delhi: Viking.
- Desjarlais, Robert R. 2003. *Sensory Biographies: Lives and Deaths Among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists*. Berkeley Calif.: University of California Press.
- Dey, Nikhil, and Preeti Sampat. 2005. Bare Acts and Collective Explorations: The MKSS Experience with the Right to Information. In *Bare Acts*, 385-396. New Delhi: Sarai Media Lab.
- Dickey, Sara. 2000. Permeable Homes: Domestic Service, Household Space, and the Vulnerability of Class Boundaries in Urban India. *American Ethnologist* 27, no. 2: 462-489. doi:10.1525/ae.2000.27.2.462.
- Dreze, Jean. 2004. Democracy and Right to Food. *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 17 April 24th: 1723-1731.
- Dubey, Sanjay. 2007a. In Contempt of Faith. *Tehelka*.
- . 2007b. Office for Profit: a Stink you should Smell. *Tehelka*.
http://www.tehelka.com/story_main33.asp?filename=Ne180807Officefor.asp.
- , Emma Tarlo, and Denis Vidal, eds. 2000. *Delhi □ : urban space and human destinies*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors.
- Edelman, M. 2001. Social Movements: Changing Paradigms and Forms of Politics. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30: 285-318.
- Edelman, Marc. 1997. "Campesinos" and "Técnicos": New Peasant Intellectuals in Central American Politics. In *Knowing your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy*, ed. Barbara Ching and Creed, 131-148. New York and London: Routledge.
- Elliott, Carolyn M. 2003. Civil Society and Democracy: a Comparative Review Essay. In *Civil Society and Democracy: a Reader*, ed. Carolyn M. Elliott, 1-39. Oxford; New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Evans, Peter, and James E. Rauch. 1999. Bureaucracy and Growth: A Cross-National Analysis of the Effects of "Weberian" State Structures on Economic Growth. *American Sociological Review* 64, no. 5 (October): 748-765.
- Evans, Rosalind. 2010. Cultural expression as political rhetoric: young Bhutanese refugees' collective action for social change. *Contemporary South Asia* 18, no. 3: 305. doi:10.1080/09584935.2010.501101.
- Favero, Paolo. 2005. *India Dreams: Cultural Identity Among Young Middle Class Men in New Delhi*. Doctoral Dissertation: Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology, 56. Stockholm: Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University.
- Femia, Joseph. 2001. Civil Society and the Marxist Tradition. In *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, 131-146. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Fernandes, Leela. 2004. The politics of forgetting: class politics, state power and the restructuring of urban space in India. *Urban Studies* 41, no. 12: 2415-2430. doi:10.1080/00420980412331297609.
- . 2006. *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

- Fernandes, Leela, and Patrick Heller. 2006. Hegemonic Aspirations: New Middle Class Politics and India's Democracy in Comparative Perspective. *Critical Asian Studies* 38, no. 4: 495 - 522.
- Fine, Ben. 2006. The New Development Economics. In *The New Development Economics: After the Washington Consensus*, ed. Jomo K. S. and Ben. Fine, 1-20. New Delhi: Tulika Books; Zed Books.
- Fine, Gary Alan. 1995. Public Narration and Group Culture. In *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, 127-143. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish*. London: Penguin Books.
- . 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- . 1991. Governmentality. In *The Foucault effect: studies in governmentality with two lectures by and an interview with Michel Foucault*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, 87-104. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Foweraker, Joe. 1995. *Theorizing Social Movements*. London; Boulder, Colo.: Pluto Press.
- Fowler, Alan. 2000. NGOs as a Moment in History: Beyond Aid to Social Entrepreneurship or Civic Innovation? *Third World Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (August): 637-654.
- Fox, Jonathan. 2007. The uncertain relationship between transparency and accountability. *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4: 663-671. doi:10.1080/09614520701469955.
- Froystad, Kathinka. 2005. *Blended Boundaries: Caste, Class and Shifting Faces of "Hinduness" in a North Indian City*. Oxford; New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 2006. Anonymous Encounters: Class Categorisation and Social Distancing in Public Places. In *The Meaning of the Local: Politics of Place in Urban India*, ed. Geert de Neve and Henrike Donner, 159-182. London: Routledge.
- Frykenberg, Robert E., ed. 1986. *Delhi Through the Ages: Selected Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society*. Oxford; New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Fuller, C. J. 1992. *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Fuller, C. J., and Haripriya Narasimhan. 2007. Information Technology Professionals and the New-Rich Middle Class in Chennai (Madras). *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 1: 121-150. doi:10.1017/S0026749X05002325.
- Fuller, C.J., and John Harriss. 2000. For an Anthropology of the Modern Indian State. In *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, ed. C.J. Fuller and Veronique Benei, 1-30. New Delhi: Social Science Press.
- Fuller, Christopher, and Veronique Benei, eds. 2000. *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*. New Delhi: Social Science Press □ ; Distributed by D.K. Publishers and Distributors.
- Gadgil, Madhav, and Ramachandra Guha. 1995. *Ecology and Equity: the Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*. London: Routledge.
- Gamson, William A. 1992. Social Psychology of Collective Action. In *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, ed. Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller, 53-76. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- . 1995. Constructing Social Protest. In *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, 85-106. London: University College London Press.

- Gamson, William A., and Gadi Wolfsfeld. 1993. Movements and Media as Interacting Systems. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528 (July): 114-125.
- Gandhi, Nandita, and Nandita Shah. 1999. Organizations and Autonomy. In *Gender and Politics in India*, ed. Nivedita Menon, 297. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Ganguly-Scrase, Ruchira, and Timothy J. Scrase. 2009. *Globalisation and the Middle Classes in India: the Social and Cultural Impact of Neo-liberal Reforms*. Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series. Oxford; New York: Routledge.
- Gaventa, John, and Rosemary McGee. 2010a. Introduction: Making Change Happen: Citizen Action and National Policy Reform. In *Citizen Action and National Policy Reform*, ed. John Gaventa and Rosemary McGee, 1-43. London; New York: Zed Books.
- Gaventa, John, and Rosemary McGee, eds. 2010b. *Citizen Action and National Policy Reform: Making Change Happen*. London; New York: Zed Books.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1971. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: an Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gill, S.S. 1998. *The Pathology of Corruption*. New Delhi: Harper Collins.
- Gitlin, Todd. 2003. *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making & Unmaking of the New Left*. [2. ed.]. Berkeley Calif.: University Presses of California Press.
- Gledhill, John. 1994. *Power & its Disguises: Anthropological Perspectives on Politics*. Anthropology, culture, and society. London; Boulder, Colo.: Pluto Press.
- . 2000. *Power and its Disguises: Anthropological Perspectives on Politics*. second edition. London; Boulder, Colo.: Pluto Press.
- Goetz, Anne Marie, and John Gaventa. 2001. Bringing Citizen Voice and Client Focus into Service Delivery. *IDS Working Paper*, no. 138.
- Goetz, Anne Marie, and Rob Jenkins. 2001. Hybrid Forms of Accountability: Citizen Engagement in Institutions of Public Oversight in India. *Public Management Review* 3, no. 3: 363-383.
- . 2005. *Reinventing Accountability: Making Democracy Work for Human Development*. Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Goody, Jack. 2001. Civil Society in Extra-European Perspective. In *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, 149-164. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gorringe, Hugo. 2010. Resounding rhetoric, retreating rebels: the use and impact of militant speeches in Tamil Dalit movements. *Contemporary South Asia* 18, no. 3: 281. doi:10.1080/09584935.2010.501097.
- Gorwala, A. D. 1951. *Report on Public Administration*. New Delhi: Government of India, Planning Commission.
- Government of India. 1964. *Report of the Committee on the Prevention of Corruption (The Santhanam Committee)*. New Delhi: Government of India: Ministry of Home Affairs.
- . 2005. Administrative Reforms Commission 2005. <http://arc.gov.in/>.
- . 2007. Constitution of India -- with all the Amendments. <http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/welcome.html>.
- Government of India, 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission. 2007. Ethics in Governance. Government of India. <http://arc.gov.in/4threport.pdf>.

- Government of India, Planning Commission. 1952. The First Five Year Plan, Chapter 6, Reform of Public Administration. Government of India.
<http://www.planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html>.
- . 1992. 8th Five Year Plan. *5 year Plans*.
<http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html>.
- . 1997. Ninth Five Year Plan. *5 year Plans*.
<http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html>.
- . 2002. 10th Five Year Plan. *5 Year Plans*.
<http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/fiveyr/welcome.html>.
- Government of India: Ministry for Urban Development. 2007. *Master Plan for Delhi 2021*. New Delhi: JBA Publishers.
- Government of India: Ministry of Urban Development. 2007. *Delhi Master Plan 2021: Reader friendly*. New Delhi: Rupa and Co.
- Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi. 2001. The Delhi Right to Information Act 2001. Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi.
<http://ar.delhigovt.nic.in/right1.html>.
- . 2008. Economic Survey of Delhi 2007-2008. Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi. <http://delhiplanning.nic.in/Economic%20Survey/ES2007-08/ES2007-08.htm>.
- . 2010. Office Of The Labour Commissioner: Minimum Wages and Rates. *Govt. of NCT Delhi: Labour Department*.
http://www.delhi.gov.in/wps/wcm/connect/doit_labour/Labour/Home/Minimum+Wages/.
- Govt. of UK: DFID. 2010. DFID - India Poorest Areas Civil Society Programme.
<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/working-with-dfid/funding-opportunities/countries-and-regions/ipacsp/>.
- Grenier, Paola. 2008. Social Entrepreneurship in the UK: from Rhetoric to Reality. In *An Introduction to Social Entrepreneurship: Voices, Preconditions, Contexts*, ed. Rafael Ziegler, 174-206. Cheltenham UK; Northampton MA: Edward Elgar.
- Grillo, Ralph, and Roderick Stirrat, eds. 1997. *Discourses of Development: Anthropological Perspectives*. Oxford: Berg.
- Gupta, Akhil. 1995. Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State. *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 2 (May): 375-402. doi:10.2307/646708.
- . 2001. Governing Population: The Integrated Child Development Services Programme in India. In *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*, ed. Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, 65-96. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- . 2005. Narrating the State of Corruption. In *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Cris Shore and Dieter Haller, 172-193. London ; Ann Arbor MI: Pluto Press.
- Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. 1992. Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference. *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1: 6-23.
- . 1997. Culture, Power, Place: Ethnography at the End of an Era. In *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, ed. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, 1-29. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

- Gupta, Dipankar. 2000. *Mistaken Modernity: India Between Worlds*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, India.
- Gupta, Narayani. 1981. *Delhi Between Two Empires 1803-1831: Society, Government and Urban Growth*. Oxford; New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Gusterson, Hugh. 1997. Studying Up Revisited. *PolAR Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 20, no. 1: 114-119. doi:10.1525/pol.1997.20.1.114.
- Hale, Charles R. 2006. Activist Research v. Cultural Critique: Indigenous Land Rights and the Contradictions of Politically Engaged Anthropology. *Cultural Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (February 1): 96-120. doi:10.1525/can.2006.21.1.96.
- Hansen, Thomas Blom. 1999. *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- . 2000. Governance and Myths of State in Mumbai. In *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, ed. C. J. Fuller and Veronique Benei, 31-67. New Delhi: Social Science Press.
- . 2001. *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Harrison, Elizabeth. 2004. The "Cancer of Corruption." In *Between Morality and the Law: Corruption, Anthropology and Comparative Society*, ed. Italo Pardo, 135-154. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- . 2006. Unpacking the Anti-corruption Agenda: Dilemmas for Anthropologists. *Oxford Development Studies* 34, no. 1: 15. doi:10.1080/13600810500495915.
- . 2007. Corruption. *Development in Practice* 17, no. 4: pp. 672-678.
- Harriss, John. 2001. *Depoliticizing Development: the World Bank and Social Capital*. New Delhi: Leftword Books.
- . 2005a. Political Participation, Representation and the Urban Poor. *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 11: 1041-1054.
- . 2005b. Middle Class Activism and Poor Peoples Politics: an Exploration of Civil Society in Chennai. *LSE Working Paper Series* 5, no. 72.
- . 2005c. "Politics is a dirty river": but is there a "new politics" of civil society? Perspectives from global cities of India and Latin America. Conference or Workshop Item. April. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/487/>.
- . 2006. Middle-Class Activism and the Politics of the Informal Working Class: A Perspective on Class Relations and Civil Society in Indian Cities. *Critical Asian Studies* 38, no. 4: 445 - 465. doi:10.1080/14672710601073002.
- . 2007. Antinomies of Empowerment: Observations on Civil Society, Politics and Urban Governance in India. *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 26: 2716-2724.
- . 2010. "Participation" and Contestation in the Governance of Indian Cities. *Simons Papers in Security and Development*, no. 3: 1-23.
- Harriss-White, Barbara. 2003. *India Working: Essays on Society and Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heller, Patrick. 2001. Moving the State: The Politics of Democratic Decentralization in Kerala, South Africa and Porto Alegre. *Politics and Society* 29, no. 1: 131 - 163. doi:10.1177/0032329201029001006.
- Henkel, Heiko, and Roderick Stirrat. 2001. Participation as Spritual Duty; Empowerment as Secular Subjection. In *Participation: the New Tyranny*, ed. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, 168-200. London: Zed Books.

- Herzfeld, Michael. 1992. *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*. Global issues. New York: Berg: Distributed exclusively in the U.S. and Canada by St. Martin's Press.
- Hirani, Rajkumar. 2006. *Lage Raho Munna bhai*. DVD. Eros Entertainment.
- Houtzager, Peter P., and Anuradha. Joshi. 2008. Introduction: Contours of a Research Project and Early Findings. *IDS Bulletin* 38, no. 6: 1-9.
- Houtzager, Peter P., Anuradha. Joshi, and Adrian Gurza Lavalle, eds. 2008. *State reform and social accountability□: Brazil, India and Mexico*. IDS bulletin, vol. 38 (2008) no. 6 (January). Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.
- Hull, Matthew S. 2003. The file: agency, authority, and autography in an Islamabad bureaucracy. *Language & Communication* 23, no. 3-4: 287-314. doi:10.1016/S0271-5309(03)00019-3.
- . 2008. Ruled by records: The expropriation of land and the misappropriation of lists in Islamabad. *American Ethnologist* 35, no. 4: 501-518. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1425.2008.00095.x.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2003. *India's Silent Revolution: the Rise of the Lower Castes in North India*. London: Hurst & Co.
- Jaishankar, Yamini, and Jean Dreze. 2005. Supreme Court Orders on the Right to Food: A tool for Action. Right to Food Campaign. www.righttofoodindia.org/data/scordersprimer.doc.
- Jayaram, N., ed. 2005. *On Civil Society: Issues and Perspectives*. Vol. 7. Themes in Indian Sociology. New Delhi; London: Sage Publications.
- Jeffrey, Craig. 2002. Caste, Class, and Clientelism: A Political Economy of Everyday Corruption in Rural North India. *Economic Geography* 78, no. 1 (January): 21-41.
- Jeffrey, Craig, Patricia Jeffery, and Roger Jeffery. 2005. Reproducing Difference? Schooling, Jobs, and Empowerment in Uttar Pradesh, India. *World Development* 33, no. 12 (December): 2085-2101. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.07.006.
- Jeffrey, Craig, and Jens Lerche. 2000. Dimensions of Dominance: Class and State in Uttar Pradesh. In *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, ed. C.J. Fuller and Veronique Benei, 91-114. New Delhi: Social Science Press.
- Jenkins, Rob. 2001. Mistaking "Governance" for "Politics": Foreign Aid Democracy and the Construction of Civil Society. In *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, 250-268. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2004. In Varying States of Decay: Anti-corruption Politics in Maharashtra and Rajasthan. In *Regional Reflections: Comparing Politics Across India's States*, ed. Rob Jenkins, 219-252. New Delhi;New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2007. Civil Society versus Corruption. *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 2: 55-69.
- Jenkins, Rob, and Anne Marie Goetz. 1999. Accounts and Accountability: Theoretical Implications of the Right-to-Information Movement in India. *Third World Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (June): 603-622.
- . 2003. Bias and Capture: Corruption, Poverty and the Limitations of Civil Society in India. In *Asian Politics in Development*, ed. Robert Benewick, Mark Blecher, and Sarah Cook, 123-149. London: Frank Cass.
- Jha, Saumitra, Vijayendra Rao, and Michael Woolcock. 2007. Governance in the Gullies: Democratic Responsiveness and Leadership in Delhi's Slums. *World Development* 35, no. 2 (February): 230-246. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.10.018.

- Joshi, Anuradha. 2010a. Do Rights Work? Law, Activism, and the Employment Guarantee Scheme. *World Development* 38, no. 4 (April): 620-630. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2009.11.012.
- Joshi, Sanjay. 2001. *Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Joshi, Sanjay, ed. 2010b. *The Middle Class in Colonial India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Juris, Jeffery S. 2008. *Networking Futures: the Movements Against Corporate Globalization*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Kabir. 2006. How to Use the Right to Information Act, 2005: for Delhi and the Surrounding Areas. Kabir.
- Kahn, Joel S, and Francesco Formosa. 2002. The Problem of Crony Capitalism: Modernity and the Encounter with the Perverse. *Thesis Eleven*, no. 69: 47-66.
- Kamat, Sangeeta. 2002. *Development Hegemony: NGOs and the state in India*. Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kaufmann, Daniel, and Aart Kraay. 2008. Governance Indicators: Where Are We, Where Should We Be Going? *World Bank Res Obs* 23, no. 1 (March 1): 1-30. doi:10.1093/wbro/lkm012.
- Kaufmann, Daniel, Aart Kraay, and Massimo Mastuzzi. 2008. Governance Matters VII: Aggregate and Individual Governance Indicators, 1996-2007. *World Bank Institute Policy Research Working Paper* 4654.
- Kaur, Ravinder. 2001. Aspects of Poverty in a Metropolis: a Case Study of an Affluent slum. In *Sustainable Human Settlements*, ed. Ravinder Sandhu Singh, Sarup Singh Minhas, and Jasmeet Sandhu, 209-223. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
- . 2006. Migrating for Work: Rewriting Gender Relations. In *Poverty, Gender and Migration*, ed. Sadhna Arya and Anupama Roy, 2:192-213. Women and Migration in Asia. New Delhi; Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage.
- Kaviraj, Sudipta. 1990. On State, Society and Discourse in India. *IDS Bulletin* 21, no. 4: 10-15.
- Keck, Margaret, and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. *Activists Beyond Borders : Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Kejriwal, Arvind. 2006. Right to Information: A Tool for Holding Government Accountable. 23rd Kelkar Alumni Lecture: March 25th 2006. IIT Kanpur Alumni Association. <http://www.iitkalumni.org/lectures/kelkar/23kelkarlecture.htm>.
- Khan, Mushtaq Husain. 2006. Corruption and Governance. In *The New Development Economics: After the Washington Consensus*, 200-221. New Delhi: Tulika Books ; Zed Books.
- Khare, Vineet, and Harinder Baweja. 2006. Killers of Justice. *Tehelka*, October 7. http://www.tehelka.com/story_main20.asp?filename=Ne100706killers_of_CS.asp.
- Kirmani, Nida. 2007. "Struggling for Transparency: The Campaign for the India's 2005 Right to Information Act,". Unpublished paper written as part of the ESRC's Non Governmental Public Action Programme in collaboration with the Institute of Commonwealth Studies.
- Klitgaard, Robert. 1998. International Cooperation against Corruption. *Finance and Development* 35, no. 1: 3-6.

- Kothari, Rajni. 1990. *Politics and the People: In Search of a Humane India*. Vol. 2. London and New Delhi: Aspect Publications.
- Krishna Menon, A.G. 2000. The Contemporary Architecture of Delhi: The role of the State as Middleman. In *Delhi: Urban Space and Human Destinies*, Ronique Dupont, Emma Tarlo, and Denis Vidal, 143-156. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors.
- Krueger, Anne O. 1974. The Political Economy of the Rent-Seeking Society. *The American Economic Review* 64, no. 3 (June): 291-303.
- Laxman, R.K. 2002. *The Best of Laxman: The Common Man Tackles Corruption*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- Leadbeater, Charles. 1997. *The Rise of the Social Entrepreneur*. London: Demos.
- Leftwich, A. 1995. Governance, Democracy and Development in the Third World. In *Development Studies: a Reader*, ed. Stuart Corbridge, 427-438. London: Arnold.
- Legg, Stephen. 2006. Post-Colonial Developmentalities: From the Delhi Improvement Trust to the Delhi Development Authority. In *Colonial and Post-Colonial Geographies of India*, ed. Saraswati Raju, M. Satish Kumar, and Stuart Corbridge, 182-204. New Delhi; Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage Publications.
- . 2007. *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi's Urban Governmentalities*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Lehmann, David. 1998. Fundamentalism and Globalism. *Third World Quarterly* 19, no. 4: 607-634.
- Lemke, Thomas. 2002. Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique. *Rethinking Marxism* 14, no. 3: 49-64.
- Lewis, David, and David Mosse, eds. 2006. *Development Brokers and Translators: The Ethnography of Aid and Agencies*. Bloomfield CT: Kumarian Press.
- Lindholm, Charles. 2008. *Culture and Authenticity*. Malden MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub.
- Lovell, David M. 2005. Corruption as a Transnational Phenomenon: Understanding Endemic Corruption in Postcommunist States. In *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Dieter Haller and Cris Shore, 65-82. London; Ann Arbor MI: Pluto Press.
- Low, Setha M. 2003. The Edge and the Centre: Gated Communities and the Discourse of Urban Fear. In *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, ed. Setha M. Low and Denise. Lawrence-Zuniga, 387-407. Malden MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Luthra, Sangeeta. 2003. Educating Entrepreneurs, Organising for Social Justice: Development Strategies in New Delhi Bastis. In *Regional Modernities: The cultural Politics of Development in India*, ed. K. Sivaramakrishnan and Arun Agrawal, 237-261. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- MacCannell, Dean. 2001. *The Tourist: a New Theory of the Leisure Class*. 2nd ed. Berkeley [u.a.]: University of California Press.
- MacPhearson, Eleanor. 2008. Invisible Agents: Women in Service Delivery reforms. *IDS Bulletin* 38, no. 6: 38-46.
- Maeckelbergh, Marianne. 2009. *The Will of the Many*. London; Ann Arbor MI: Pluto Press.
- . 2011. Doing is Believing: Prefiguration as Strategic Practice in the Alterglobalization Movement. *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 10, no. 1: 1. doi:10.1080/14742837.2011.545223.

- Mahan, Rajan. 2006. RTI Exposes Janawad Scam. *Right2Information - Master Key to Good Governance*. <http://right2information.wordpress.com/2006/07/16/rti-exposes-janawad-scam/>.
- Mander, Harsh. 2003. Corruption and the Right to Information. In *Does Civil Society Matter? Governance in Contemporary India*, ed. Rajesh Tandon and Rajnita Mohanty, 145-163. New Delhi; Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Mander, Harsh, and Abha Joshi. 1999. The Movement For Right to Information in India: People's Power for the Control of Corruption. Unpublished Paper. <http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/ai/rti/india/articles/The%20Movement%20for%20RTI%20in%20India.pdf>.
- Marcus, George E. 1983. *Elites: Ethnographic Issues*. School of American Research advanced seminar series. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
- . 1995. Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 95-117. doi:10.1146/annurev.an.24.100195.000523.
- . 1998. *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Markovits, Claude. 2010. What about the Merchants? A Mercantile Perspective on the Middle Class of Colonial India. In *The Middle Class in Colonial India*, ed. Sanjay Joshi, 118-131. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Mawdsley, Emma. 2004. India's Middle Classes and the Environment. *Development & Change* 35, no. 1: 79-103.
- Mazzarella, William. 2003. *Shovelling Smoke*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- . 2005. Centre of South Asian Studies at SOAS: Keywords In South Asian Studies: Middle Class. <http://www.soas.ac.uk/southasianstudies/keywords/index.html>.
- . 2006. Internet X-Ray: E-Governance, Transparency, and the Politics of Immediation in India. *Public culture: bulletin of the Project for Transnational Cultural Studies*. 18, no. 3: 473-506.
- Mehra, Rakeysh Omprakash. 2006. *Rang De Basanti*. DVD. UTV Motion Pictures.
- Mentschel, Stefan. 2005. *Right to information: an appropriate tool against corruption?* New Delhi: Mosaic Books.
- Milgram, B. Lynne. 2008. Activating Frontier Livelihoods: Women And The Transnational Secondhand Clothing Trade Between Hong Kong And The Philippines. *Urban Anthropology* 37, no. 1: 5-47.
- Miller, Sam. 2008. *Delhi: Adventures in a Mega City*. New Delhi: Penguin/Viking.
- Miller, William L., Asa B. Grodeland, and Tatanya Y. Koscheckkina. 2001. *A Culture of Corruption? Coping with Government in Post-communist Europe*. Budapest: Central European University Press.
- Mills, C. Wright. 1959. *The Power Elite*. Galaxy books no.20. New York: Oxford U.P.
- Mines, Mattison. 1994. *Public faces, private voices: community and individuality in South India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mishra, Neelabh. 2003. *People's Right to Information Movement: Lessons from Rajasthan*. Discussion Paper Series No. 4. New Delhi: UNDP Human Development Resource Centre.
- Mistry, Rohinton. 1996. *A Fine Balance*. 1st ed. New York: Knopf; Distributed by Random House.

- Mitchell, Jon P. 1996. Patrons and Clients. In *The Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, ed. Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer, 416-418. London; New York: Routledge.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 1991. The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and their Critics. *The American Political Science Review* 85: 77-96.
- Mitra, Arup. 2003. *Occupational Choices, Networks and Transfers: An Exegesis Based on Micro Data from Delhi Slums*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors.
- MKSS Collective. 2005. The Problem in Speaking Truth to Power: a Symposium on People's Right to Information. *Seminar*, no. 551. <http://www.india-seminar.com/2005/551.htm> accessed.
- Mogilishetty-Farias, Deepika. n.d. The Freedom of Information Bill 2002 – a comparative perspective. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. <http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/ai/rti/india/articles/The%20Freedom%20of%20Information%20Bill%202002.pdf>.
- Morris-Jones, W H. 1963. India's Political Idioms. In *Politics and Society in India*, ed. Sir Cyril Henry Philips, 133-154. Studies on modern Asia and Africa, no. 1 1. London: G. Allen & Unwin.
- Morrison, Ken. 1995. *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Thought*. London; Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Mosse, David. 2004. Is Good Policy Unimplementable? Reflections on the Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice. *Development and Change* 35, no. 4: 639-671. doi:10.1111/j.0012-155X.2004.00374.x.
- . 2005. *Cultivating Development: an Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice*. London, Ann Arbor MI: Pluto Press.
- Mosse, David, and David Lewis. 2006. Theoretical Approaches to Brokerage and Translation in Development. In *Development Brokers and Translators: The ethnography of Aid and Agencies*, ed. David Lewis and David Mosse, 1-26. Bloomfield CT: Kumarian Press.
- Mosse, David, and David Lewis, eds. 2005. *The Aid Effect: Giving and Governing in International Development*. London; Ann Arbor MI: Pluto Press.
- Mukhopadhyay, Amitabh. 2007. File Notings and Governmentality. *Seminar*, no. 569: 84-88.
- Myrdal, Gunnar. 1968. *Asian Drama*. Vol. 2. London: The Penguin Press.
- Nader, Laura. 1972. Up the Anthropologist—Perspectives Gained from Studying Up. In *Reinventing Anthropology*, ed. Dell H. Hymes, 284-311. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Nash, June. 2005. Introduction: Social Movements and Global Processes. In *Social Movements: An Anthropological Reader*, ed. June Nash, 1-27. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- National Association of People's Movements. 2007. Beyond Gandhigiri. National Association of People's Movements.
- Nayak, Venkatesh. 2009. Amendments to the RTI Act - The File Notings Issue - Recollections from 2006 - June 18th, 2009. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/ai/rti/india/national/2009/possible_amendment_of_rti_act_2005_email_alerts/amendments_to_the_rti_act_the_file_notings_issue_recollections_from_2006_june_18_2009.pdf.

- Nisbett, Nicholas. 2006. The Internet, Cybercafes and the New Social Spaces of Bangalorean. In *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology*, 129-148. 2006th ed. Oxford; New York: Berg.
- Nuijten, Monique. 2003. *Power, Community and the State: the Political Anthropology of Organisation in Mexico*. London: Pluto Press.
- Nyamu-Musembi, Celestine, and Andrea Cornwall. 2004. What is the "Rights based Approach" all About: Perspectives from International Development Agencies. *Institute of Development Studies Working Paper* 32, no. 234.
- Oldenburg, Philip. 1976. *Big City Government in India: Councilor, Administrator and Citizen in Delhi*. Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors.
- Omvedt, Gail. 1993. *Reinventing Revolution : New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India*. Armonk N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe.
- Osella, Filippo, and Caroline Osella. 2000. The Return of King Mahabali: the Politics of Morality in Kerala. In *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, ed. Christopher Fuller and Veronique Benei. Delhi: Social Science Press ; Distributed by D.K. Publishers and Distributors.
- Pande, Suchi. 2008. The Right to Information and Societal Accountability: The Case of the Delhi PDS Campaign. *IDS Bulletin* 38, no. 6: 47-55. doi:10.1111/j.1759-5436.2007.tb00418.x.
- Pande, Suchi, and Shekhar Singh. 2007. *Right to Information Act, 2005: a primer*. 1st ed. New Delhi: National Book Trust India.
- Parry, Jonathan P. 2000. The "Crisis of Corruption" and "the Idea of India": a Worm's eye View. In *Morals of Legitimacy: Between agency and System*, ed. Italo Pardo, 27-55. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Paul, Sohini. 2006. Strengthening Grassroots Democracy through the National Rural Guarantee Act and the Right to Information Act. *Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative*.
http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/new/2006/strenthening_grassroots_democracy_thro_nrega_&_rti_act.pdf.
- Peck, Lucy. 2005. *Delhi, a Thousand Years of Building*. New Delhi: The Lotus Collection.
- Pels, Peter. 2000. The Trickster's Dilemma: Ethics and the Technologies of the Anthropological Self. In *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*, ed. Marilyn Strathern. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Pierce, Steven. 2006. Looking Like a State: Colonialism and the Discourse of Corruption in Northern Nigeria. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48, no. 4: 887-914. doi:10.1017/S0010417506000338.
- de Pina-Cabral, Joao. 2000. Introduction. In *Elites: Choice, Leadership and Succession*, ed. Joao de Pina-Cabral and Antonia Pedroso de Lima, 1-5. Oxford; New York: Berg.
- Pinney, Christopher. 2001. Introduction: Public, Popular and Other Cultures. In *Pleasure and the Nation: The History, Politics and Consumption of Public Culture in India*, ed. Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney, 1-34. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Polzer, Tara. 2001. Corruption: Deconstructing the World Bank Discourse. *LSE Working Paper Series*, no. No. 01-18.
- Potter, Jonathan, and Margaret Wetherell. 1994. Analyzing Discourse. In *Analyzing Qualitative Data*, ed. Alan Bryman and Robert G. Burgess, 47-66. London: Routledge.

- Prasad, S, ed. 1987. *The Right to Know*. National Media Centre, New Delhi.
- Price, Pamela. 1999. Cosmologies and Corruption in (South) India - Thinking Aloud. *Norwegian Institute for International Affairs Forum for Development Studies*, no. 2.99: 315-327.
- Public Affairs Centre. 2007. *India's Citizen's Charters: A decade of Experience*. Public Affairs Centre, Bangalore.
http://www.sasanet.org/curriculum_final/downloads/SM/Books%20&%20Articles/S%20Ar7.pdf.
- Raghavendra, M. K. 2006. Globalism and Indian Nationalism. *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 16 (April 22nd - 28th): 1503-1505.
- Rajagopal, Arvind. 2001. *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2008. Afterword: Fast-Forward into the Future, Haunted by the Past: Bollywood Today. In *Global Bollywood*, ed. Anandam P. Kavoori and Aswin Punathambekar, 300-306. New York: New York University Press.
- Rajan, Radha, and Krishen Kak, eds. 2006. *NGOs, Activists & Foreign Funds: Anti-Nation Industry*. Ed. 1st. Chennai: Vigil Public Opinion Forum.
- Rao, Shakuntala. 2007. The Globalization of Bollywood: An Ethnography of Non-Elite Audiences in India. *The Communication review* 10, no. 1: 57-76.
- . 2008. Accountability, Democracy, and Globalization: A Study of Broadcast Journalism in India. *Asian Journal of Communication* 18, no. 3: 193-206.
- Rapport, Nigel, and Joanna Overing. 2000. *Social and Cultural Anthropology : the Key Concepts*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Reddy, Deepa S. 2005. At Home in the World: Women's Activism in Hyderabad, India. In *Social Movements: An Anthropological Reader*, ed. June Nash, 304-326. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Reddy, Sheela. 2006. Gandhi, a Second Coming. *Outlook, New Delhi*, 11th September.
- Reinhold, Susan. 1994. Local Conflict and Ideological Struggle: "Positive Images" and Section 28. Unpublished DPhil. Thesis, University of Sussex, UK.
- Right To Food Campaign. 2003. Right to food Campaign: Update 23. Right to Food Campaign. <http://www.righttofoodindia.org/links/updates/update23.html>.
- Robbins, Paul. 2000. The rotten institution: corruption in natural resource management. *Political Geography* 19, no. 4 (May): 423-443. doi:10.1016/S0962-6298(99)00087-6.
- Rodman, Margaret. 2003. Empowering Place: Multilocality and Multivocality. In *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, ed. M Seta and Denise. Lawrence-Zuniga. Oxford: Blackwell Pub.
- Roniger, Luis. 1998. Civil Society, Patronage and Democracy. In *Real Civil Societies: Dilemmas of Institutionalization*, 66-85. London; Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Rossinow, Doug. 1998. *The Politics of Authenticity*. New York: Columbia Univeristy Press.
- Routledge, P. 2003. Voices of the dammed: discursive resistance amidst erasure in the Narmada Valley, India. *Political Geography* 22, no. 3 (March): 243-270. doi:10.1016/S0962-6298(02)00095-1.
- Routledge, Paul, Andrew Cumbers, and Corinne Nativel. 2007. Grassrooting network imaginaries: relationality, power, and mutual solidarity in global justice networks. *Environment and Planning A* 39: 2575-2592.

- Roy, Aruna. 2004. Update on the discussions of the NAC. CHRI.
http://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/programs/ai/rti/india/national/nac_news_aug04.pdf.
- . 2010. The Journey Begins: A Decade of Struggle. *Transparency Review* 3, no. 2: 5-6.
- Roy, Aruna, and Nikhil Dey. 2001a. The Right to Information: Facilitating People's Participation and State Accountability. In *Asia-Pacific Workshop*. Prague.
- . 2001b. Chasing a Right. *Frontline* 18, no. 7 March 31 - April 13.
<http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1807/18070480.htm>.
- . 2004. The Redistribution of Power. *Seminar*, no. 541. <http://www.india-seminar.com/2004/541/541%20aruna%20roy%20&%20nikhil%20dey.htm>.
- Roy, Srirupa. 2007. *Beyond belief*: Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Rudolph, Lloyd, and Susan Rudolph. 1967. *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rushdie, Salman. 1981. *Midnight's Children*. 1st ed. New York: Knopf.
- Ruud, Arild Engelson. 2000b. Talking Dirty about Politics: A view from a Bengali Village. In *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, ed. C. J. Fuller and Veronique Benei, 115-136. New Delhi: Social Science Press.
- . 2000a. Corruption as Everyday Practice. The Public-Private Divide in Local Indian Society. *Forum for Development Studies* 27, no. 2: 271-294.
- Sampson, Steven. 1996. The Social Life of Projects: Importing Civil Society to Albania. In *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*, ed. Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn, 121-142. London; New York: Routledge.
- . 2005. Integrity Warriors: Global Morality and the Anti-Corruption Movement in the Balkans. In *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Dieter Haller and Cris Shore, 103-130. London: Pluto Press.
- Sanders, Todd, and Harry West G. 2003. Power Revealed and Concealed in the New World Order. In *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order*, ed. Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, 1-37. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy. 1995. The Primacy of the Ethical: Propositions for a Militant Anthropology. *Current Anthropology* 36, no. 3 (June 1): 409-440.
- Scott, James. 1998. *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sethi, Aman. 2006a. Unwanted Citizens. *Frontline* 23, no. 1 (January 14).
<http://www.flonnet.com/fl2301/stories/20060127002104500.htm>.
- . 2006b. Uneasy Reprieve. *Frontline* 23, no. 20 (October 7).
<http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2320/stories/20061020002903400.htm>.
- Sethi, Harsh. 1998. Micro Struggles, NGOs and the State. In *People's Rights: Social Movements and the State in the Third World*, ed. Manorajan Mohanty. New Delhi; Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage Publications.
- Sharma, Aradhana, and Akhil Gupta. 2006. Introduction: Rethinking Theories of the State in an Age of Globalization. In *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, ed. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, 1-42. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Sharma, Arvind. 2003. *The Study of Hinduism*. Columbia S.C.: University of South Carolina Press.

- Sheth, D. L. 1999. Secularisation of Caste and Making of New Middle Class. *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no. 34/35: 2502-2510.
- Sheth, D. L., and Harsh Sethi. 1991. The NGO sector in India: historical context and current discourse. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 2, no. 2 (November 1): 49-68. doi:10.1007/BF01398670.
- Sheth, D.L. 2004. Globalization and the New Politics of Micro Movements. *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 1: 46-58.
- Sheth, D.L., and Harsh Sethi. 1996. The NGO Sector in India: Historical Context and Current Discourse. In *Development Policy and Administration*, ed. Kuldeep Mathur, 280-301. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Shiva Kumar, A. K., and Government of NCT of Delhi. 2006. *Delhi human development report 2006: partnerships for progress; government of NCT of Delhi*. New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shore, Cris, and Stephen Roberts. 1993. Higher Education and the Panopticon Paradigm: Quality assessment as "Disciplinary Technology." In University of Sussex.
- Shore, Cris, and Susan Wright. 1999. Audit Culture and Anthropology: Neo-Liberalism in British Higher Education. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5, no. 4 (December): 557-575. doi:10.2307/2661148.
- . 2000. Coercive Accountability: The Rise of Audit Culture in Higher Education. In *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*, ed. Marilyn Strathern, 57-89. London: Routledge.
- Shore, Cris, and Susan Wright, eds. 1997. *Anthropology of Policy: Critical Perspectives on Governance and Power*. London: Routledge.
- Singh, Gurharpal. 1997. Understanding Political Corruption in Contemporary Indian Politics. *Political Studies* 45, no. 3: 626-638. doi:10.1111/1467-9248.00099.
- Singh, Kushwant. 1975. Are we a Corrupt People? In *Corruption in India*, ed. Suresh Kohli, 9-16. New Delhi: Chetna Publications.
- Singh, Shekhar. undated. Social Mobilisation and Transparency: The Indian Experience. Paper prepared for the International Task Force on Transparency, a part of the Initiative on Policy Dialogue, University of Columbia, New York.
- Singh, V.B. 2000. Political Profile of Delhi and Support Bases of Parties: An Analysis. In *Delhi: Urban Space and Human Destinies*, Emma Tarlo, and Denis Vidal, 205-225. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors.
- Singhvi, Vir. 2006. Redirecting Middle Class Anger. *Sunday Hindustan Times*, December 24, New Delhi edition.
- Sinha. 1975. *State of UP Vs Raj Narain*, (3) 333 Supreme Court Reporter. Supreme Court of India.
- Spear, Percival. 1945. *Delhi: A Historical Sketch*. Bombay: Oxford University Press.
- . 1951. *Twilight of the Mughals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sridharan, E. 2004. The Growth and Sectoral Composition of India's Middle Class: Its Impact on the Politics of Economic Liberalization. *India Review* 3, no. 4 (October 1): 405-428.
- Srivastava, C.P. 2001. *Corruption: India's Enemy Within*. New Delhi: Macmillan India.
- Srivastava, Sanjay. 2007a. Citizens and Others: Urban Spaces, Consumerism and Middle Class Activism in Delhi. Unpublished paper presented at the Workshop on the Middle Classes at the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, 15th – 17th March 2007. Delhi.

- . 2007b. *Passionate Modernity*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- . 2009. Urban Spaces, Disney-Divinity and Moral Middle Classes. *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 26 & 27: 338-345.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 2000a. The Tyranny of Transparency. *British Educational Research Journal* 26, no. 3: 309-321.
- Strathern, Marilyn, ed. 2000b. *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*. Oxford; New York: Routledge.
- Szeftel, Morris. 1998. Misunderstanding African Politics: Corruption & the Governance Agenda. *Review of African Political Economy* 25, no. 76 (June): 221-240.
- Tandon, Rajesh. 2002. *Voluntary Action, Civil Society, and the State*. New Delhi: Mosaic Books.
- Tarlo, Emma. 2000a. Paper Truths: The emergency and Slum Clearance Through Forgotten Files. In *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, ed. C.J. Fuller and Veronique Benei, 68-90. New Delhi: Social Science Press.
- . 2000b. Welcome to History: A Resettlement Colony in the Making. In *Delhi: Urban Space and Human Destinies*, ed. Veronique Dupont, Emma Tarlo, and Denis Vidal, 51-74. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors.
- . 2003. *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of India's "Emergency"*. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- The Hindu. 2006. Seeking Justice in Priyadarshini murder case. *The Hindu*, July 24, New Delhi edition. <http://www.thehindu.com/2006/07/24/stories/2006072413180100.htm>.
- Thomas, Rosie. 1995. Melodrama and the Negotiation of Morality in the Mainstream Hindi Film. In *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in South Asian World*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge, 157-182. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Thussu, Daya Kishan. 2007. The 'Murdochization' of News? The Case of Star TV in India. *Media Culture Society* 29, no. 4 (July 1): 593-611. doi:10.1177/0163443707076191.
- Tilly, Charles. 2008. Social Movements and National Politics. In *Social Movements: A reader*, ed. Vincenzo Ruggiero and Nicola Montagna, 186-194. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Toye, John. 1987. *Dilemmas of Development*. Oxford; New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Transparency International India. 1999. *Consolidated Report of Conferences and Workshops on "Delays in Indian Judicial System - Remedial Measures" and Matters Relating to Judicial Reform*. New Delhi: Transparency International India.
- . 2005. *India Corruption Study: 2005*. New Delhi: Transparency International India.
- Tsoukas, Haridimos. 1997. The Tyranny of Light: The Temptations and Paradoxes of the Information Society. *Futures* 29, no. 9: 827-843.
- Varma, Pavan K. 1998. *The Great Indian Middle Class*. New Delhi; New York, NY, USA: Viking.
- Vasi, Ion Bogdan. 2008. New Heroes, Old Theories? Toward a Sociological perspective on Social Entrepreneurship. In *An Introduction to Social Entrepreneurship: Voices, Preconditions, Contexts*, ed. Rafael Ziegler, 155-173. Cheltenham UK; Northampton MA: Edward Elgar.
- VeneKlasen, Lisa, Valerie Miller, Cindy Clark, and Molly Reilly. 2004. Rights-Based Approaches and Beyond: Challenges of Linking Rights and Participation. *Institute of Development Studies Working Paper* 32, no. 235.

- Verma, Gita. 2002. *Slumming India* : a chronicle of slums and their saviours New Delhi; New York: Penguin Books.
- Veron, Rene, Stuart Corbridge, Glyn williams, and Manoj Srivastava. 2003. The Everyday State and Political Society in Eastern India: Structuring Access to the Employment Assurance Scheme. *Journal of Development Studies* 39, no. 5: 1-28.
- Visvanathan, Shiv. 2008. The Necessity of Corruption. *Seminar No. 590*. http://www.india-seminar.com/2008/590/590_shiv_visvanathan.htm.
- Vittal, N. 2003. *Corruption in India: The Roadblock to National Prosperity*. New Delhi: Academic Foundation.
- Wadley, Susan. 1994. *Struggling with destiny in Karimpur, 1925-1984*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Waldrop, Anne. 2004. Gating and Class Relations: The case of New Delhi Colony. *City and Society* 16, no. 2: 93-116.
- Watt, C.A. 2005. *Serving the Nation: Cultures of Service, Association and Citizenship in Colonial India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Webb, Martin. 2010. Success stories: rhetoric, authenticity, and the right to information movement in north India. *Contemporary South Asia* 18, no. 3: 293-304. doi:10.1080/09584935.2010.501098.
- Weber, Max. 1947. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization: translated by A.M.Henderson and talcott parsons. Ed.with an introd. by talcott parsons*. Glencoe Ill.: Free Press.
- . 1952. The Essentials of Bureaucratic Organization: An Ideal Type Construction. In *Reader in Bureaucracy*, ed. Robert K. Merton, Ailsa P. Gray, Barbara Hockey, and Harry C. Selvin, 18-26. New York: The Free Press.
- Wimmer, Andreas, and Nina Glick-Schiller. 2002. Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences. *Global Networks* 2, no. 4: 301-334.
- Win, Everjoice J. 2007. Not very Poor, Powerless or Pregnant: the African woman Forgotten by Development. In *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations and Challenges*, ed. Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison, and Ann Whitehead, 79-85. London: Zed Books.
- Wirth, Louis. 1938. Urbanism as a Way of Life. *The American Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 1 (July): 1-24.
- Wolpert, Stanley A. 1961. *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and the Making of Modern India*. Oxford; New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- World Bank. 1992. *Governance and development*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- . 2002. *World Development Report 2002: Building Institutions for Markets*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2007. *Strengthening World Bank Group Engagement on Governance and Anti-Corruption*. New York: World Bank.
- Zaitchik, Alexander. 2006. Aniruddha Bahal: The King of Sting. *The Independent*, November 19, sec. People. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/aniruddha-bahal-the-king-of-sting-424594.html>.

- Zerilli, Filippo M. 2005. Corruption, Property Restitution and Romanianess. In *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Dieter Haller and Cris Shore, 83-99. London ; Ann Arbor MI: Pluto Press.
- Ziegler, Rafael. 2009. *An Introduction to Social Entrepreneurship: Voices, Preconditions, Contexts*. Cheltenham UK; Northampton MA: Edward Elgar.